A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MULTICULTURAL DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY MODEL FOR GIFTED, SAVED AND PROSPERING MILLENNIALS

Charles Lee-Johnson

Bachelor, Morehouse College, 1997
M.S.W., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001

Faculty Mentors
C. Dennis Williams, D.Min.
Ralph Williamson, D.Min.

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By

Charles Lee-Johnson
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Faculty Mentor(s)
Rev. C. Dennis Williams, D. Min
Rev. Ralph Williamson, D. Min

Date:_____

Approved: _____

_____
Faculty Mentor(s)

_____
Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies

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ABSTRACT

A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
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The discipleship model designed for this project addressed the attrition of millennials in Corona Community AME Church through the implementation of a multicultural young adult education program in Corona, California. Through educational and mentoring meetings, more than sixteen millennials participated in a five-week discipleship experience. The qualitative research methodology included pre- and post-tests, surveys and focus groups to evaluate the discipleship model's impact on young adult church absenteeism. The data results suggested the young adult discipleship program enriched participants' understanding of Christianity, enabled participants to align behaviors with Christian beliefs, and increased attendance and involvement in the local church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

All praise and glory to God, who has guided me through this process and to whom I am forever grateful for choosing me to minister the Gospel; to my wife, Monalisa, who is my backbone, best friend and beautiful queen; to my children, Chacity, Jazmine, Destiny, Ajamn and Kokayi, for your love, patience and support; to my Mother, who is always the "wind beneath my wings"; to my mentors, Reverends C. Dennis Williams and Ralph Williamson, for great guidance and support; to my peers, who have blessed me incredibly along this journey; to my brother, Albert Brady, you inspire me; and to the great disciples of Corona Community AME Church for allowing me to be their "Pastor".

This project is dedicated to the memory of my father, the late Reverend Ronald F. Johnson, my Sensei, my hero, my teacher, my role model, my priest and my foundation; to my grandmother, Winnie T. Reece, who was called to glory during this process, I can feel you with me in everything I do; and to my late cousin, Terence Stringer, thanks for being the greatest friend I could ever have.

Keeping the faith,

Charles Lee-Johnson
May 2015

INTRODUCTION

This project is designed to implement a young adult education discipleship program that effectively recruits and retains young adults in the multicultural ministry of Corona Community AME Church. The discipleship model is designed to enrich young adults' understanding of the Christian faith, enhance their ability to align their lifestyle with Christian beliefs, and encourage young adult attendance and involvement in the local church.

Chapter One provides an exploration of the researcher's "Damascus experience", in which God revealed the dangers of young adult absenteeism within the church. Throughout the chapter, the researcher provides a spiritual autobiography to examine his life experiences; a contextual analysis detailing the history, ministry and vision of Corona Community AME Church; and a synergy analysis explaining the need for a multicultural young adult ministry that can successfully attract and engage millennials.

Chapter Two presents the state of art in ministry, providing a working definition for the term "millennial" and examining the behaviors, practices and habits of millennials, especially as it relates to Christianity. This chapter is important to the project, as it helps to unearth best practice strategies that must be employed to effectively engage the millennial generation.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical foundations for the project, which include: 1) The theological foundation, exploring the doctrinal roots of Methodism, African Methodism and the Trinity as the framework for an intergenerational ministry; 2) The biblical foundations (Old and New Testament), exploring the biblical mandate for multicultural and intergenerational ministry; 3) The historical foundation, which examines the important role young adults have consistently played in the spreading of Christianity and the growth of the universal church; and lastly, 4) The social theory concerning millennial attrition.

Chapter Four presents the research design and qualitative tools utilized to measure the effectiveness of the five-week discipleship program for millennials, in which participants were engaged in a weekly intervention and connected with mentors. Here, the researcher presents the problem statement, hypothesis and the instrumentation utilized to examine young adult absenteeism within the local church. The qualitative data collection tools used include pre- and post-tests, interviews and focus groups.

Chapter Five documents the field experience during the implementation of the young adult discipleship model. The researcher shares the five-phase system of the intervention (planning, curriculum design, recruitment, implementation and evaluation) and presents the results from pre- and post-tests, interviews and focus groups.

Chapter Six provides a reflection, summary and conclusion of the project, presenting: 1) Lessons learned during and following the implementation of the discipleship program for young adults; 2) Suggestions for future research; and 3) The impact the doctoral project has made upon the researcher's personal and pastoral life.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

A few years ago, a mother in my congregation approached me following our morning service and requested that I be present at her son's funeral. She explained that her family wanted the funeral to be held at their church and already had selected a minister for the service, but that she would really appreciate my presence at the service. Her son and three of his friends were killed in a car crash due to driving while intoxicated. This information concerning their intoxication was not discovered through a toxicology report, but rather through their own admission just one minute before the crash, as they posted pictures of themselves on Facebook while they were driving, bragging about how "high" they were. The police reported that they were driving at unsafe speeds and struck a tree, which caused the truck they were driving to catch on fire. One young man in the car made it out, but three of the young men, including my parishioner's son, were trapped and they burned to death. I had never met this young man, who was in his mid-twenties, and I wondered, had I ever had an encounter with this young man, would that have made a difference.

I attended the funeral service and I was amazed to see such a large gathering of young adults present for the funeral, especially due to the hour. As I exited my car to

enter the church, I witnessed young adults smoking weed in the church parking lot. Inside, they used profane language in the sanctuary, their bodies were laced with tattoos from their arms to their necks, nearly every young man had pants hanging off their behinds, young ladies were dressed in club attire that revealed every body part that should be sacred, and there was a spirit of apathy that permeated the entire place. Even more, many of these young adults were already parents, as they had little kids with them, and even the presence of their children did not cause them to refrain from using profanity, smoking marijuana, or being disrespectful in the house of God. In my mind, I began to ask myself, if these young adults have no respect for God's house or themselves, what will happen to the generation they are raising?

As I met the minister who was leading the service, I expressed my feelings to him concerning the state of these young adults, and his response left me even more vexed. He said, "Let's hurry up and get this over with so we can get them out of here and off this property." As young people spoke in the service, remembering their deceased friend, they often used profane language and no one corrected them. The minister preached a five-minute eulogy that simply told them to be comforted that their friend was in a better place, and then everyone was rushed away from the sanctuary. There were no calls to salvation, no appeals for young people to come to church, no recognition of the behavior that led to the death of their friend, and no admonition for their disrespect of the church. It was clear that the church was not interested in reaching these young adults, and the sooner they could get rid of them, the better things would be.

I did not attend the graveside services, but for more than a week, I was disturbed by what I had witnessed at that funeral. In hopes that this was just an isolated situation, I

began talking with other church leaders and some of our young adults, who explained what I witnessed was not an aberration but the norm. Church leaders explained how they had seen the same things, and while many of them did address the behavior of young adults who disrespected the church, nearly all of them admitted that they had been unsuccessful in recruiting and retaining young adults within their congregations. As I expressed my desire to address this issue, I realized that even within my church, which is relatively young compared to most churches in my denomination, young adults ages eighteen to thirty-five are missing from my congregation, and I never really noticed. For the first time, I realized that every week during our worship services, we were theoretically holding a funeral service for young adults, who not only were not in attendance, but we weren't even looking for them. Like the young men who burned in that truck, our failure as a church was contributing to the possibility of an entire generation burning in Hell, and we had failed to act. Like many churches, the church I pastor, Corona Community AME Church, has a wealth of young kids and teens and we pour a lot of attention and resources into these groups. But once they graduate from high school and no longer attend church, we seem to just hope that one day they will return.

The objective of this project is to suggest a discipleship model for young adults ages eighteen to thirty-five, to recruit and retain young adults in our churches, and insure the health and wealth of young adults and the church collectively. Both young adults and churches need one another, and any failure of the two to work collectively will lead to their respective deaths. As stated by Paul the Apostle,

> The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one

> Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you." In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. (1 Corinthians 12:12-22)[1]

Just as there is unity within the triune nature of God, there must be unity across generations within the church. The church cannot afford to ignore, reject, or neglect young adults, nor can young adults abandon, disregard, or be disconnected from the church. Both group needs one another, and this project seeks to bridge the gap that presently exists between the church and young adults.

Spiritual Autobiography

I am a pastor today because, as a young person, my church poured abundantly into me. I was raised in a family that had nearly been destroyed by my grandmother's alcoholism and my grandfather's early death. My mother was raised in a house where she did not receive the love she needed, and in the early stages of being a young adult, she became pregnant with me, her only biological child. My biological father was an alcoholic, who later became a drug addict, and his abuse and my mother's codependency had us on a path of destruction. At twenty-one years old, my mother was single, in an

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[1] *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 2523-2524.

abusive relationship, speaking profanely, acting tough, and struggling to make ends meet. My father was underemployed, minimally educated, consistently intoxicated, and going nowhere with his life. I was the kid of two young adult parents, similar to those I witnessed at the funeral. The path for my life was changed the day my mother took me to Ward African Methodist Episcopal Church, under Pastor Frank Madison Reid III, a young pastor in the Los Angeles area, who insured that there were programs for every age cohort. Although I joined the church as a kid, only five years old, I was engaged by young adults who led Sunday schools, Bible studies, martial arts classes, rites of passage classes and more within the church. Seeing other young people on fire for God and leading ministries made the Gospel more relevant and real for me, as well as provided great role-modeling and allowed for the establishment of great relationships. Today, I know that my walk with God and my call to ministry have their foundation in the church's use of young people as leaders.

Due to the awesome transformation that was made in my life and my family, I always knew I wanted to work with young people and young adults. However, as I went to college, I sought careers that would pay good money and never seriously considered working in a church. I graduated from Morehouse College and began working in a nonprofit corporation, National Family Life and Education Center, that was founded in my old church, but had recently become its own separate entity, while offering many of the same programs that changed my life growing up. The services were no longer offered at the church, as there was a change in the pastorate, and the new pastor and leadership were not favorable to having certain kinds of people on church grounds. While working as a program director, I returned to school at UCLA to get my master's degree in social

welfare. In 2002, I became the CEO of National Family Life and Education Center, and my work with young people and young adults was featured in many newspapers and newscasts. In 2010, I was even awarded Social Worker of the Year in Los Angeles, but something was missing.

In 2008, I had become the pastor of Corona Community AME Church in an effort to find what was missing. Corona is a fast-growing, young city recently voted by America's Promise Alliance as one of the "top 100 cities for young people".[2] Only seven California cities made the list, with three of those seven being cities that surround the Corona area. America's Promise Alliance evaluates cities using the following criteria: "caring adults", "safe places", "a healthy start", "effective education", and "opportunities for young people to help others".[3] Many families from the surrounding Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties are moving their families into cities like Corona in an effort to provide a better quality of life for their children. As the population increases, there is an increased demand for the provision of the services that have made Corona such a great place for young people. This is an opportunity for the church, and it's an opportunity that complements the gifts that God has given me and many of our parishioners.

Presently, Corona Community AME Church does an excellent job in engaging adults, with a variety of ministries. However, ministries for youth and young adults have sorely lacked the support, organization and priority that should be afforded them. Additionally, CCAME has sought to simply comply with the guides of our denomination

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[2] Dayna Straehley, "CORONA: City Named One of 100 Best," *The Press Enterprise*, November 7, 2011, accessed January 20, 2015, http://www.pe.com/local-news/riverside-county/corona/corona-headlines-index/20111107-corona-city-named-one-of-100-best.ece?ssimg=370405.

[3] Ibid.

by establishing a "YPD" (Young People's Department), even with the common feeling that the processes and practices of the connectional YPD are antiquated and ineffective in engaging many of today's youth. For example, about two years ago, the pastor presented a paper during an annual conference to petition that the connectional church amend the organizational structure of the YPD. Presently, the YPD is under the sole leadership of the Women's Missionary Society, which means that nearly all the leaders of YPD are women. While most of the conference agreed with the suggestions, many of the leaders of the Women's Missionary Society took exception with the suggestions, as they felt these were attempts to change age-old traditions and structure within the church. The presentation was simply suggesting to them that young people, especially young men, will never seriously get involved in YPD as long as it is led only by women. Additionally, men, who are sorely needed as role models, teachers, advocates and mentors for both boys and girls, are less likely to be involved with young people in our denomination since all youth programs are under the Women's Missionary Society. Unfortunately, the connectional church's refusal to break tradition has contributed to countless young people leaving churches, and finding no ministries that can protect and guide them like the one that benefited me. Initially, my frustration with our church leadership's unwillingness to break with tradition led me to disengage from my efforts to help young people in our connectional church. However, my spiritual autobiography reminded me that when I was younger, our church had a YPD, but our pastor also had the foresight to provide additional programming for young people that was led by both men and women and provided the kinds of teaching that related to the youth of that day. He did not make the church or the connection choose between the two, but simply expanded

the services that were offered to young people. These programs did not compete with YPD, but were supplementary and complementary to YPD. The collaboration provided a well-balanced strategy to benefit all young people in our community. Additionally, the church benefited incredibly, as families that brought their young people to these programs also became members of the church, and the church grew exponentially through the implementation of these programs. Parents love their children. And if a church can provide support services for families that will benefit their children, those parents will support and love the church as well.

Corona Community AME Church has been blessed to have numerous members who are employed in the fields of social work, education, mental health and social services. Unfortunately, the church has not utilized these gifts for the benefit of the young adults in our community or to grow the church. We have employed nearly every strategy presented in various books or Christian conferences on "how to grow your church" while neglecting to use the skills, talents and strengths that many parishioners professionally possess. This has been my fault, as my unwillingness to face my own grief of my father's passing led me to neglect this area of ministry. However, my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis led me to understand that God blessed me to experience the things I experienced growing up so that I could utilize those things I learned to help young people in ministry.

This process has directed me to focus my project on developing a discipleship model to engage young adults in the twenty-first century. I am confident that this will be an eclectic approach that will be a hybrid between what was offered to me and what young people are presently looking for. This project will benefit the local church, as well

as endear Corona Community AME Church to the city of Corona, as it seeks to strengthen the community's proud accomplishment of being one of the "100 Best Communities for Young People". God has blessed me with a gift to help young people, and pastoring does not mean that I reject that gift, but instead it should motivate me to expand upon this gift. At thirty-eight years old, I am one of the youngest pastors in my conference, and one of the greatest contributions I can give to my connectional church and my local church is my affinity for young people and young adults.

Contextual Analysis

Over the last decade, Corona has been one of the Inland Empire's fastest-growing cities. In 2000, the city of Corona had a population of about 125,000 people, and in 2010 the population was 152,000 people.[4] Corona is known as the "Gateway to the Inland Empire", as the 91 Riverside Freeway runs through the middle of the city, connecting Corona to Riverside to the east and Orange County to the west. Likewise, the 15 Freeway connects Corona to cities such as Rancho Cucamonga, Fontana, Ontario, Yorba Linda and Norco to the north and Lake Elsinore to the south, while the 71 Freeway connects Corona to Chino Hills, Chino and Pomona. CCAME is, therefore, strategically positioned as a church that can service communities and persons of varying cities and backgrounds. According to the 2010 Census, 60% of the population in Corona is Caucasian, 44%

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[4] "State & County QuickFacts: Corona (city), California," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed November 20, 2012, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0616350.html.

Latino, 10% Asian and 6% African-American.[5] A total of 64% of all households in Corona are married couples living together, and 50% have children ages eighteen or younger living with them.[6] A total of 33.4% of Corona residents are under the age of eighteen, 8.9% are eighteen to twenty-four, 35.1% are twenty-five to forty-four, 16.8% are forty-five to sixty-four, and 5.8% are sixty-five years of age or older.[7] The median age is thirty years old.[8] The median income for the city of Corona is $98,000, and about 8% of the population lives below the poverty line.[9]

As the gateway to the Inland Empire, it's important to also understand the demographics of the Inland Empire (IE). Home to more than four million people, the metropolitan area consists of Riverside County and San Bernardino County and is the thirteenth most populous metropolitan area in the United States, and the third largest in the state of California.[10] With a population of 1,506,816, it is the fourth largest urban area in the state.[11] Most of the area's population is located in the southwest corner of the

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] "Annual Estimates of the Population of Combined Statistical Areas: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2010", *U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division,* April 7, 2010, accessed December 2, 2007, http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/metro_general/2006/CBSA-EST2006-02.csv.

[11] "Inland Empire," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inland_Empire_%28California%29.

region bordering metropolitan Los Angeles. Seventy-eight percent of IE residents view themselves as Christians and 14% profess no religion.[12] A total of 27% of IE residents attend some form of religious service once a week, 14% attend more than once a week, 15% once a month, and 14% only attend services on major religious holidays.[13]

As many as one-third of working adults commute out of the 27,000-square-mile (70,000 km^2) region to find work, the highest proportion of any area in the country.[14] Unemployment reached an all-time high of 15% percent in 2010, second in the nation only to Detroit among metropolitan areas with populations over 1 million. The Inland Empire is fourth in the nation in the number of foreclosures.[15]

In California State legislature, Corona is in the 37th Senate District, represented by Republican Bill Emmerson and in the 71st Assembly District represented by Republican Jeff Miller.[16] Federally, Corona is in California's 44th Congressional District and is represented by Republican Kent Calvert.[17] The mayor of Corona is Stan Skipworth.[18]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "Corona, California," *Wikipedia*, accessed November 20, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corona,_California.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

The city of Corona is a part of the Corona-Norco Unified School District.[19] There are eight high schools in Corona: Corona, Centennial, Lee V. Pollard (formerly Buena Vista), Orange Grove, Santiago, Norco, John F. Kennedy Middle College High School and Eleanor Roosevelt High School.[20] There are seven middle schools in Corona: Auburndale, Citrus Hills, Corona Fundamental, El Cerrito, Raney, Norco and River Heights.[21] There are also 33 elementary schools in the city: John Adams, Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton, Cesar Chavez, Corona Ranch, Coronita, Eastvale, Dwight Eisenhower, Foothill, Ben Franklin, Garretson, Harada, Highland, Home Gardens, Jefferson, Lincoln Alternative, William McKinley, Norco, Orange, Parkridge, Prado View, Promenade, Rosa Parks, Riverview, Sierra Vista, Stallings, Temescal Valley, Dr. Bernice Todd, Vandermolen, Vicentia, Victress Bower, George Washington and Woodrow Wilson.[22] Additionally, many of the residents of Corona attend community colleges within the Riverside Community College District, which include: Norco College, Riverside City College and Moreno Valley College. The area is filled with a plethora of colleges and universities, including: University of California, Riverside, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State San Bernardino and Cal Baptist University.

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[19] "Corona-Norco Unified School District," 2009, accessed November 20, 2012, http://www.cnusd.k12.ca.us/site/default.aspx?PageID=1.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

Only 37% of three- and four-year olds in the region are enrolled in preschool, with only one school in the region for every 343 children.[23] A total of 35% of the IE's ninth graders do not graduate from high school, and only 37% of its college-age residents enroll in a post-secondary education program of some sort.[24] Only 24% of the IE's adult residents have attained a college degree or better,[25] and 25% do not possess a high school diploma.[26] According to CSUSB President Al Karnig, "We have a very low college attendance rate that is scantly above half of what the average is in other states. We have only have about 20% college graduates in the Inland Empire, while the average in other states is 38%."[27] Twenty-one IE high schools rank in the top 100 in California for producing dropouts.[28] Riverside received a CLIP Grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation because Riverside was recognized as one of America's "dumbest cities".[29]

Corona Community AME (CCAME) Church was founded in 2002 by Rev. Noella Buchanan (affectionately called "Rev. No"), who was serving with her husband, Rev. Morris Buchanan, the then Pastor of Bethel AME Church Fontana. CCAME was birthed

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[23] "Inland Empire," *Wikipedia.*

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Caroline An, "Inland Empire College-going Rate Among California's Lowest," *San Bernardino County Sun,* November 10, 2006, accessed November 25, 2007, http://www.sbsun.com/ci_4639260.

[28] "Inland Empire," *Wikipedia.*

[29] Ibid.

to establish the A.M.E. Church in the Corona area of the Inland Empire, as a few members who were attending Bethel Fontana were driving from Corona to attend services in Fontana, about a 30-minute commute with traffic. Rev. Noella Buchanan was on the ministerial staff of Bethel AME Fontana when God called her to start CCAME. Before founding the church as a mission in Corona, Rev. No walked up and down the streets of Corona praying for God's direction and blessing. Ironically, she prayed over the building (321 East Sixth Street) in which the church currently resides, not knowing that six to seven years later, CCAME would occupy that building. From its inception, God has been directing the growth of CCAME.

CCAME began meeting in the home of present members Michael and Allene Gray. As the church grew, CCAME moved their worship services to a Masonic lodge in Corona. The church gained members while in the lodge, and was able to amass a healthy savings account that provided good financial security for the church. In a desire to have a more permanent worship space (as members had to constantly set up and break down at the Masonic lodge), Corona Community AME Church relocated once more to a storefront property on McKinley Avenue in Corona. In 2005, Bishop John Richard Bryant appointed Rev. Tracy Johnson as CCAME's second pastor. Rev. Tracy Johnson grew the church through dynamic preaching and his spirit of fellowship. He proudly served CCAME and helped the church to grow tremendously. Due to irreconcilable differences, Rev. Tracy Johnson was replaced as pastor of CCAME on February 17, 2008, in which Bishop John Richard Bryant appointed Rev. Charles Lee-Johnson as the pastor of CCAME Church.

Rev. Charles Lee-Johnson is the present pastor of CCAME. When Rev. Lee-Johnson assumed the pastorate at thirty-two years of age, the church was financially "in the red" and numerous members had left the church due to differences with the previous pastor. In fact, the church had less than forty members attending service, failed to renew the lease for its worship space, and was thereby being asked to move immediately with little money at its disposal. Under Rev. Lee-Johnson's leadership, the church has more than quadrupled in weekly attendance, more than tripled in membership, has numerous ministries throughout the week, and has become a strong powerhouse for the Lord in the city of Corona. Due to an expiring lease in 2008, CCAME was forced to relocate. After searching many sites, God led CCAME to its present location at 321 East Sixth Street in the downtown district of Corona. Initially, the city of Corona objected to another church coming into the downtown district of Corona, but with a lot of prayer, God moved City Council to vote unanimously in our favor. CCAME has prospered and grown tremendously, and we believe God is getting ready to take us even higher. CCAME presently has 300 members on the church roster, of which nearly 60% are present for weekly services. CCAME has more than nineteen ministries and four Bible study classes. Additionally, CCAME owns a handicap-accessible van that was donated to the church by the Riverside Transit Authority and provides transportation services for members and prospective members. In November 2012, CCAME created a mobile phone app, available via Google play and iTunes, which has helped the church become more connected and diverse. While the majority of members are African-American, CCAME has attracts persons of Latino, Caucasian and Asian descent. Additionally, CCAME has become one of the youngest and most spirited congregations of the Southern California Conference of

the AME Church, as the overwhelming majority of members are less than fifty years of age. The church has become one of the few young, racially diverse AME churches in the Southern California conference.

Corona Community AME Church evangelizes to bring people to Jesus and welcome them into Christian fellowship; equips believers to fulfill God's purpose for their lives by involving them in activities that serve the community/world around them; encourages believers to walk by faith and not by sight by living according to Biblical principles and the guidance of the Holy Spirit; empowers families by teaching Christian principles for marriage, parenting, youth development, and life skills; and enhances the worship and service of our Lord by celebrating and demonstrating our thankfulness for the awesome forgiveness of sins provided to us through Jesus Christ.

Mission of the AME Church

The Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed. At every level of the connection and in every local church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the A.M.E. Church evolved – that is, to seek out and save the lost and serve the needy through a continuing program of (1) preaching the gospel, (2) feeding the hungry, (3) clothing the naked, (4) housing the homeless, (5) cheering the fallen, (6) providing jobs for the jobless, (7) administering to the needs of those in prisons, hospitals, nursing

homes, asylums and mental institutions, senior citizens' homes; caring for the sick, the shut-in, the mentally and socially disturbed, and (8) encouraging thrift and economic advancement.[30]

CCAME Vision Statement

The model of being a "GREAT" church has been adopted from the work of Stan Toler in his book *The People Principle: Transforming Laypersons into Leaders.* This book was studied for more than a year by the leadership team of CCAME, and the "GREAT" model presented below has been adopted by the church.

Grow Through Evangelism ("Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." – Luke 14:23, NASB) – We seek to grow by evangelizing our surrounding communities with outreach evangelism, invitations to worship services, programs and activities where the love of Christ can be shared.[31]

Reproduce Through Discipleship ("Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." – Matthew 11:29, NASB) – We reproduce disciples for Christ through one-on-one mentoring for new members and growing Christians in the Word of God.[32]

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[30] "The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" (General Conference, Philadelphia, PA, 1992), 11.

[31] Stan Toler, *The People Principle: Transforming Laypersons into Leaders* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1997), 1-52.

[32] Ibid.

Equip Believers for Ministry ("For the equipping of the saints for the works of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." – Ephesians 4:12, NASB) – We equip believers for work and service, giving them opportunities to build up the body of Christ through the use of their spiritual gifts, interests, skills and abilities.[33]

Assimilate New Members into the Body of Christ ("Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their numbers day by day those who were being saved." – Acts 2:47, NASB) – We assimilate new members into the body of Christ through relational ministry and creating a desire and passion in the heart to be a part of a Great Commission Church with a personal ministry.[34]

Teach and Preach God's Word in a Relevant Way ("And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept on teaching and preaching Jesus as Christ." – Acts 5:42, NASB) – We teach and preach God's word to the churched and the unchurched in a contemporary and relevant way while preserving the message of salvation and holy living.[35]

Numerous articles and books have been written within the last decade advancing various theories on the decline of young adults in the church. The pages of these articles and books are filled with strategies and techniques designed to equip church leaders with the necessary tools to reach and retain young adults in Christian communities. The decline in young adult church attendance and Christian identity is very important, as it

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

has serious implications on the future of the Christian faith and the church. Young people embody the energy, creativity, rebelliousness and radicalism that are essential components of the Christian faith and social change. Churches that fail to attract young people will not only eventually find themselves "out of business", but will also likely become houses of ritualism versus radicalism and institutions of conformity and compromise, versus institutions of challenge and controversy which is what has always made the church relevant in our society. Jesus and his disciples were a young group of revolutionaries, part of the church, but also challengers of the church to be more than a house of traditionalism. If Christians are to maintain any relevance in our world today, the church must re-establish its roots in the radical and revolutionary teachings of Jesus Christ, of which young adults have always been and will continually be its best progenitors.

While the absence of young adults in churches across America is an issue for all churches, the black church has been particularly damaged by this phenomenon. As the old adage goes, "If whites in America have a cold, then black people have the flu." The black church and community have been horribly crippled by the absence of young adults. Not only have young adults not been present to drive forward the social justice arms of the church, but we are witnessing a generation who have initiated relationships, begun families with children, entered vocations, and started their lives all outside of the tutelage of the church. This is an alarming trend, as it has made the church virtually irrelevant in the lives of many young adults and their respective families. The church has always been the "cornerstone" of the black community. However, in this post-civil rights era, many African-Americans are questioning the necessity of "black social institutions" (i.e.,

colleges, businesses, etc.), and the church has not been exempt from this conversation. This sentiment has certainly been expressed by African-American young adults who often still identify themselves as Christian, but do not consider themselves religious or church-goers. The decline in black church attendance has correlated with spikes in black incarceration, homicide rates, teen pregnancy rates, and educational, economic, health and employment disparities. Church leaders and parishioners are frequently engaged in discussions about the decline in youth and young adult attendance in churches. The complex questions raised by both church leaders and parishioners are too often answered cavalierly, with most attributing the absence of youth and young adults to the perceived "moral failure" of young adults themselves. This blame-the-victim tactic has not served the church well, as it has only added to a growing list of issues that have led to the mass exodus of young adults from the church. "Despite what some have said, today's young people are no less spiritual than their predecessors, but they live in a time when the loss of faith in social institutions – no less religious ones – is understandable and epidemic."[36] The diminishing respect and alarming distrust for the black church is echoed frequently in hip hop songs, and frequently cited by young adults as the reason they do not attend church. "Questionable theology, dubious politics, hierarchal practices, excessive materialism and an utter captivity to custom are the hallmark of many black churches in the twenty-first century. Hip hop had to be born because, among other reasons, the black church was no longer being faithful to its own calling."[37] African-American young adults

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[36] Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip Hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping Our Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 13.

[37] Ibid.

have found a new "guiding voice" in hip hop and, like it or not, hip hop with all of its shortcomings, has the hearts of the young adults of black America. Hip hop has mirrored the church in many ways. What does hip hop do that we fail to do?

Just fifty-five years ago, the Christian church was dealing with issues concerning "young adults", but the problem was much different. Instead of advancing theories about how to reach and retain young adults, many authors of the late 1950s and 1960s were contemplating necessary changes that churches needed to make, to accommodate the over influx of "young adults" that were filling America's churches. In 1959, noted author Robert Clemmons wrote a book entitled *Young Adults in the Church*, in which he wrote:

> One of the most vital and alert movements within the churches in the last decade has been among young adults. These young married couples have come to the churches by the thousands seeking guidance for themselves and Christian nurture for their children. Single young adults have accompanied them and joined in their fellowship. This ever-increasing throng of families and single persons has put new demands for leadership upon the churches.[38]

The church saved my life. Certainly, introducing my family and I to the saving grace of Jesus Christ has been the most important event of my life. However, the church also provided outstanding programs that engaged me, inspired me, taught me, and protected me from the dangers of the streets. I learned about the Bible, but I also learned about dating, peer pressure, self-esteem, self-defense, budgeting and much more. Without these programs, I cannot imagine where I would be today. The foundation for me to become a pastor was laid very early and consistently in my life, and my life is a testimony to Proverbs 22:6, which says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and

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[38] Robert Clemmons, *Young Adults in the Church* (New York, NY: Abington Press, 1959), 20.

even when he is old, he will not depart from it." Despite the dysfunction, abuse and tribulation in the early years of my life, the ministerial programs directed towards young people equipped me with the tools I needed to change the trajectory of my life. I was mentored by incredible young adult leaders who created a culture of "family" amongst the youth of our church and supported and guided us as surrogate parents. While the youth Bible studies, Sunday School classes, Youth Choir and Young People's Department (YPD) of our church were phenomenal and taught me a lot, most of my preparation for life came through the jiu-jitsu classes and Rites of Passage program in our church. These two programs were implemented conjointly and required all participants' involvement three times per week. Moreover, the pastor of the church, also participated in the classes and was very supportive of the entire program. Most of the young people in that program attribute much of their success today to those two programs provided by our church in our youth.

As I reviewed my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis, I discovered that there are some very unique ministerial gaps in the church that I pastor. It's ironic that my life was saved by some dynamic programs in my church when I was growing up, and that I have failed to insure that those programs are made available to young people in the church that I now pastor. In my subconscious, I have known that programs are needed for our young people and young adults, but I constantly occupied myself with other things. As I was writing my spiritual autobiography, I realized something disturbing within myself. In reflection with my mentors, I realized that I was rejecting this area of ministry because it reminded me so much of my father, who led many of the youth and young adult ministries for my church while I was growing up. Ironically, this was never an issue

for me professionally, but it has been a major issue for me as a pastor. Writing caused me to identify that my failure to work with young adults was rooted in my grief concerning the loss of my dad.

In addition to dealing with grief, I realized that my three daughters, as they graduated high school, like many millennials, were not regularly attending church either, and their lifestyles were more reflective of the world, and not Christ. As I watched them enter abusive relationships, drop out of college, and engage in risky behaviors, I wondered where we went wrong, and I spent many nights praying to God to help them. My relationship with my own millennial daughters was very strained, as I battled to understand why they were not thriving as I thought they should.

Confronting the grief of my father's passing, and my personal battle to understand my daughters, along with recognizing that young adults were missing from Corona Community AME Church, led me to hearing a new call from the Lord. I remembered the incredible work that was done in my teens and early adulthood years that led me to having a strong foundation in Jesus Christ. I was blessed to be a part of incredible youth and young adult ministries that were real, made the Bible relevant, and were led by spiritual leaders who created authentic relationships with all participants. I realized that my daughters, and numerous millennials around our church, were being robbed of that rich experience, and God was calling me to reach them. The problem was not millennials, or my young adult daughters, but rather my failure as a pastor to insure that I provided a program within the church to reach this generational cohort.

The Lord clearly spoke into my heart that He wants me to minister to the millennial generation. I discovered that numerous families within CCAME were

struggling with their young adult children, just as I was with my daughters, and they desperately wanted something for their beloved sons and daughters. My professional experiences and achievements as a social worker and community college educator have equipped me with great abilities to positively engage young people and young adults. While I had used those skills in the secular world to motivate young adults towards life success, it became clear that God wants me to use these skills within the church to lead the young adults in and around CCAME to a deeper walk with Christ. God placed within my heart to create a unique ministry called "Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering", a discipleship group that would enrich millennials' understanding of Christianity, enable participants to align their behaviors with Christian beliefs, and increase attendance and involvement by millennials in the local church.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY

"Millennial" is the generational title prescribed to those who are born in the early 1980s through the early 2000s. The term was first used around 1987 by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069,* to describe the generation born "around the time 1982, born children were entering preschool and the media were first identifying their prospective link to the millennial year 2000".[1] The term millennial was the preferred term versus Generation Y, to describe those who are presently between eighteen and thirty-five years of age.

The millennial generation is much different than its predecessors. While the traditionalists/silents (those born prior to 1946, ages sixty-four and older), Baby Boomers (those born 1946-1964) and even Generation Xers (born between 1965-1979) possess many differences and similarities, researchers have discovered that millennials often differ greatly from the preceding generations at the same age. Their views on race, family, politics, education, employment and religion have been shaped by a world much different than previous generations, as millennials have been the beneficiaries of the numerous sacrifices, social justice battles and sufferings of our forbearers. They were

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[1] William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York, NY: Vintage Original, 2000), 370.

born into an America that afforded them access and acquisition to many of the rights our ancestors prayed for, fought for, were incarcerated for, and even died for. While they still confront the vestiges of racism, economic inequality and white supremacy, they also live in a world where anything is possible, especially in an era where they were the main impetus behind the two-time election of the first non-white president of the United States. They do not see themselves as limited or contained as previous generations. They possess entitlements, lofty aspirations and unlimited possibilities. Businesses, community-based organizations, governmental agencies and countless others have invested great resources to understand this millennial generation, as they are aware that a failure to learn the behaviors, habits and desires of this generation can spell failure for their respective entities. In a recent article in *U.S. News and World Report*, reporter Rick Newman wrote,

> Vijay Govindarajan, a professor at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business and co-author of *The Other Side of Innovation*, says successful companies tend to fall into three traps that make the glory days fleeting. First is the physical trap, in which big investments in old systems or equipment prevent the pursuit of fresher, more relevant investments. There's a psychological trap, in which company leaders fixate on what made them successful and fail to notice when something new is displacing it. Then there's the strategic trap, when a company focuses purely on the marketplace of today and fails to anticipate the future. Some unlucky companies manage a trifecta and fall into all three traps.[2]

Similarly, many American mainline and evangelical churches are stuck relishing the "glory days". While some have managed to keep the doors open, too many are full of gray-haired heads, emptier pews, lack of any youth presence, and are probably a decade or two from extinction. Unfortunately, many churches suffer from the trifecta Newman

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[2] Rick Newman, "10 Great Companies that Lost their Edge," *U.S. News and World Report*, August 19, 2010, accessed January 28, 2015, http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/flowchart/2010/08/19/10-great-companies-that-lost-their-edge.

mentioned as they are caught in the physical trap of failing to invest in systems and equipment that could reach a younger generation, the psychological trap in which they fail to notice the new trends emerging (social media, technology, etc.), and the strategic trap in which there is no intentional and progressive plan being implemented to reach the millennial generation. Indeed, our church is in dire need of a twenty-first century model for church administration and preaching in a multicultural context to engage new millennial members as well as maintain our existing congregation.

We are living in a time where we are witnessing the disappearance of American companies that were once staples in American consumerism. Companies like Blockbuster Video, Sears, Kmart and Circuit City have all been heralded as examples of failing to adjust to the changing world, thereby leading them to a shrinking presence or even extinction. Part of the big misses for these companies has been failing to engage the millennial generation. Likewise, the work of addressing the absence of millennials from our churches must be considered urgent as well, as our failure to successfully attract this twenty-first century generation can lead to churches and ministries becoming obsolete.

Who Are Millennials?

Millennials are the largest generational cohort in the history of America, with nearly eighty million constituents, or 24% of the U.S. population.[3] They are America's

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[3] "So How Many Millennials Are There in the U.S. Anyway?", *MarketingCharts.com*, accessed February 24, 2014, http://www.marketingcharts.com/.

most diverse generation, with 38% of them being bilingual.[4] A recent study by the National Chamber Foundation revealed, "The shifting population is evidenced with 60% of 18-29 year olds classified as non-Hispanic white, versus 70% for those 30 and older. This reflects a record low of whites, with 19% Hispanic, 14% black, 4% Asian and 3% of mixed race or other. Additionally, 11% of millennials are born to at least one immigrant parent."[5] Unlike previous generations, who were more loyal to racially based institutions, the millennial generation is more likely to have friends of varying backgrounds and reject institutions that fail to embrace diversity. Immigration and racial amalgamation have led to widespread community gentrification, in which neighborhoods that were previously segregated are now made up of families and individuals of varying racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. This has posed a very unique challenge for many churches, whose surrounding communities have changed, but the rhetoric of the church has remained the same. Author Scott Williams states, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best nearly 40 years ago: 'We must face the sad fact that at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning, when we stand to sing…we stand in the most segregated hour in America.' Unfortunately, not much has changed since Dr. King's statement."[6] How comfortable will a Latino parishioner feel attending a church that caters primarily to a black audience,

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[4] Ibid.

[5] "Millennials in Adulthood," *PewSocialtrends.org*, March 7, 2014, accessed February 24, 2015, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/.

[6] Scott Williams, *Church Diversity: Sunday, the Most Segregated Day of the Week* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2011), 40.

and whose pastor preaches sermons rooted in black liberation theology? Joseph P. Fitzpatrick in his book *One Church, Many Cultures* says, "The church now faces a new challenge of inculturation, as the United States faces a new process of assimilation."[7] Millennials reject the idea that they can attend a diverse school, shop in stores that cater to diverse populations, eat in restaurants that serve diverse patrons, engage in interracial dating/marriages, but attend a segregated church. Pastors and parishioners that seek to engage millennials must be intentional in being diverse in language, sermons, materials, programs, food, music and traditions. This certainly will mean that "church", as many have known it, will have to change. Churches cannot blame waning attendance on the demographic changes in the neighborhood, when the more serious issue is not changing demographics, but the church's failure to adapt to a more diverse audience.

Millennials are America's most educated generation,[8] with a high school graduation rate of 72%, the highest in two decades,[9] and 23% of them possessing a bachelor's degree or higher.[10] The millennial generation has put a real premium on educational attainment as, "Some 34% of 25- to 29-year-olds held a bachelor's degree, master's degree, professional degree or doctoral degree last year, a higher share than in

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[7] Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *One Church, Many Cultures: The Challenge of Diversity* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1987), 125.

[8] "Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change," *Pew Research Center*, 2009, accessed January 28, 2015, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1501/millennials-new-survey-generational-personality-upbeat-open-new-ideas-technology-bound.

[9] "College Enrollment and Work Activity of 2011 High School Graduates," *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, April 19, 2012, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.nr0.htm/.

[10] Ibid.

any year in data going back to 1968."[11] Millennials have opted to pursue degrees in efforts to boost income, understanding "research showing such investment pays off over time, the increases in educational attainment will probably promote gains in earnings, consumer spending and ultimately economic growth".[12] While millennials will likely have higher earnings than previous generations, they will also be a generation that is deep in debt, primarily due to school loans. A recent article by CNN reported "four in ten millennials say they are overwhelmed by their debt".[13] Despite the struggles with debt, "The majority, or 72%, of millennials said they 'are confident they will be able to save enough to create the lifestyle they want in the future,'" the survey found. And 68% said they expect their standard of living will be better than that of their parents.[14] Since this generation is more education, career and economically motivated, churches seeking to reach millennials will likely benefit from offering college assistance programs, book vouchers, employment training, financial and credit management programs, and other programs that will motivate young adults to enter church grounds.

While education is important to the millennial generation, when it comes to religion, especially Christianity, young Christians tend to possess a type of "shallow faith

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[11] Victoria Stilwell, "Millennials Most Educated U.S. Age Group After Downturn: Economy," *Bloomberg News*, October 8, 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-10-08/millennials-become-most-educated-u-s-age-group-due-to-recession.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Blake Ellis, "Millennials 'Overwhelmed' by Debt," *CNN.com*, June 11, 2014, accessed January 27, 2015, http://money.cnn.com/2014/06/11/pf/millennials-debt/.

[14] Ibid.

that…does not require the nurture of a faith community to thrive".[15] Noted authors Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, in their book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers,* describe the religion of today's young Americans as "moralistic therapeutic deism".[16] Moralistic therapeutic deism is described as a sort of "new religion" amongst young Americans that is rooted in essentially five points:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.[17]

David Kinnaman, in his book *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith*, describes this "moralistic therapeutic deism" as beliefs that are, "Christian on the surface, but once you dig a little deeper, you find they are not quite orthodox".[18] This kind of religion does not require Bible study, church attendance or organized Christian service. This may be why many young adults feel religious, but don't feel led to attend church. Despite their thirst for and access to information,

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[15] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 40-41.

[16] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me,* 40-41.

millennials appear to be very "biblically illiterate". Churches that seek to educate young adults in church history, systematic theology and Christian ethics might find very enthusiastic students within the millennial generation.

The millennial generation has been raised in the information age, in which technology has made information accessible by the push of a button or swipe of a screen. A recent survey uncovered that 97% of millennials owned a computer and 94% owned a cell phone.[19] As America's most technologically savvy generation,[20] they communicate primarily via Internet, text messaging, instant messaging and social media. Seeking to reach this generation via U.S. postal mail, phone calls or even email may prove ineffective, as this generation relies more heavily on faster media for information. In fact, 60% report social media is an important source of news and current affairs.[21]

> This generation of 18- to 34-year-olds is also digitally native, which means that marketers and brands that want to engage with them need to understand their media-consumption habits. For starters, three out of four own a smartphone. They also thrive on social media, using it as a source of current affairs apart from networking. They have an increasing affinity for image-sharing platforms, and despite the prevalence of Netflix and Hulu, a majority of millennials still have paid-TV subscriptions.[22]

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[19] Reynal Junco and Jeanna Mastrodicasa, *Connecting to the Net.generation: What Higher Education Professionals Need to Know About Today's Students* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2007), 58.

[20] David D. Burstein, *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping Our World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 20

[21] Tanya Dua, "Millennial Media-consumption Habits Explained, In 5 Charts," *Digiday.com,* October 21, 2014, accessed January 27, 2015, http://digiday.com/brands/millennial-media-consumption-habits-debunked-5-charts/.

[22] Ibid.

In our effort to engage the millennial generation, the church must use technology and social media. This generation has been dubbed "technology addicts", as technology and social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Vine and Snapchat, have become their dominant means of communication. "The most recent research tells us that the average 8- to 18-year-old is spending more than seven hours a day engaged with media."[23] Instead of demonizing technology and media, church leaders must look for constructive ways to use media to engage young adults in Christianity. Churches could successfully witness to young adults by establishing Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat accounts to remain connected to its young adult constituents. Christian teaching and biblical encouragement could be shared via these media resources, thereby keeping young people engaged in church ministry.

Millennials and the Church

In the past five years, much of the discussion of the disappearance of youth and young adults from church pews has been led by two groups: Focus on the Family and The Barna Group. Interestingly, the two groups offer vastly differing theories concerning the causes for young adults leaving the church, and thereby offer differing solutions to recruit and retain young adults in our churches. The differences in opinions are reflective of the generation gap in the church, as Focus on the Family is led by elder Christians who often feel a need to "defend" the church and hold tight to tradition. Conversely, The Barna Group is led by young adults who are pushing for the church to be open to the differences

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[23] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 83.

of this generation. Therefore, the interpretation of data by both sides is used to advance their respective theories concerning young adults and the Christian faith.

Focus on the Family

Focus on the Family is a nonprofit organization that promotes conservative views on issues surrounding marriage, parenting, sex, public policy and lifestyle. Focus on the Family reaches millions of people via its radio broadcasts, publishing and its support of various churches. As one of the premier leaders of the evangelical movement in America, Focus on the Family has conducted research and led various discussions on why young adults are missing from America's churches.

In a recent study entitled "Millennial Faith Participation and Retention", researchers from Focus on the Family theorize that young people have left the faith because, "they did not have a 'solid religious upbringing'".[24] This theory is based upon Focus on the Family's survey in which they discovered, "only 11% of those who abandon their childhood Christian faith say they had a very strong faith as a child and came from a home where a vibrant faith was taught and practiced."[25] The motto for conservative groups like Focus on the Family has become, "Young people cannot keep what they were never given." For Focus on the Family and similar groups, young adults leaving the faith

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[24] "Millennial Faith Participation and Retention," *Focus on the Family*, August 2013, accessed January 28, 2014, http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/focus-findings/religion-and-culture/millennial-retention.aspx.

[25] "Faith in Flux: Change in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.," *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* (April 2009): 4.

is a matter of the home, thus more healthy homes would lead to better retention of young adults in the church. In fact, one of the key summaries of their study states, "Strong families produce lasting faith. Children coming from homes where faith is practiced seriously (but not perfectly) are strongly predicted to carry that faith into adulthood. Conclusion: Create homes where children learn and witness a vibrant faith that's lived out honestly and intentionally. Perfection is not required, only diligence and faithfulness."[26]

In their advancement of this theory for declining numbers of young adults in churches, it appears that this is just more "blaming the victim". It is a theory that seeks to defend the church, while failing to see the church's role. It is possible that the failure of this generation's parents to raise the millennial generation with a solid Christian upbringing might be a consequence of the church's failure to adequately engage the parents of the millennials when they were young adults raising their children. Theories such as these seem to be scared that any suggestion of lack or failure on the side of the church might lead to a mass takeover of liberalism in the church. These theories do more to protect the church's stance on abstinence – only education and conservative lifestyles – than they seek to address the heart of the issue of what young people say about the church.

Additional to the blame being shifted to families, conservatives like Focus on the Family use the data to suggest that the problem of young people leaving the church is not as big of a problem as we think it is. In a section of the study marked "Good News", the following is stated, "Conservative Protestant churches are actually growing…slightly.

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[26] "Millennial Faith Participation and Retention," *Focus on the Family.*

According to the General Social Survey (GSS) – a nationally representative survey of American adults – conservative Christian churches are increasing slightly (from 30.9% of the U.S. population in 1991 to 31.5% in 2012).Of course, this means that the growth rate in real numbers is markedly greater!"[27] Again, these are efforts to defend the church, instead of addressing the church to reach those that it is losing. Focus on the Family asserts that the reason it seems like there is an issue with young adults leaving the church is because of a group called the "nones", which are young adults who claim to not belong to any faith. "But the real change is among those claiming no particular religious affiliation (the 'nones'), which increased from 8.1% to 19.7% of the general population (1991 to 2012)".[28]

The Barna Group

The Barna Group was founded in 1984 and is presently led by David Kinnaman. "The ultimate aim of the firm is to partner with Christian ministries and individuals to be a catalyst in moral and spiritual transformation in the United States. It accomplishes these outcomes by providing vision, information, evaluation and resources through a network of intimate partnerships."[29] The research and abstracts of the Barna Group are the most widely published and cited data and commentary on the present absence of young people

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "About Barna Group," *Barna Group*, accessed January 28, 2014, https://www.barna.org/about#.VOqC0vnF9IE.

in America's churches. Two recent books written by the Barna Group's CEO, Dr. David Kinnaman, have been dedicated to the issue of young adult church drop-outs as well. In his first book, *Unchristian: What a Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters*, Kinnaman presents the research gathered from surveys of young adults who do not attend church and explores their issues with the church. Kinnaman is unique in his approach to the subject, as he rebels against previous theoreticians who have blamed young adults and their materialism and moral failures for their absence from the church. Instead, Kinnaman theorizes that the church has lost sight of its purpose and has become everything that Jesus stood against. In this work, Kinnaman reveals that young adults who are not presently in the church reject it for primarily three reasons: (1) The church is hypocritical; (2) The church is insensitive; and (3) The church is judgmental. Kinnaman juxtaposes this outside view of young adults about the Christian church with the teachings of love, harmony, brotherhood, forgiveness and oneness that were taught by Jesus. His work reveals some alarming issues within the church that cannot be shoved off onto hip hop, technology, movies, etc., but suggest that young adults are left to these other vices because of the church's failure to stand on the teachings of Jesus.

In his second book, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith*, Kinnaman discusses why young adults who have been in the church leave the church. This internal perspective of young adults in the church, uncovers more issues within the church than were revealed in *Unchristian*. He identifies three groups of young adults that drop out, and he classifies them as prodigals, nomads and exiles.

If the church is to retain and reach the millennial generation, it is imperative for the church to seek to not only focus on the spiritual welfare of this generation, but also to understand the social, psychological, physical, economic and technological forces that are influencing and impacting this generation and to modify the church's approach to witness to this generation where they are. Many models that are being implemented in churches or advanced by various authors are simply finding new ways to do the same old thing. However, millennials are not interested in doing the "old thing" better, they have something new to offer, and the church must open itself for reformation.

Erik Erikson

Early psychology, especially the works of Dr. Sigmund Freud, focused almost exclusively on the importance and influence of one's childhood. Dr. Robert Michels writes, "Although psychoanalysis has become a developmental psychology, it has tended to see development as synonymous with the first years of life, and it has continued to view adult life as a product of development, rather than a developmental epoch."[30] Experiences from one's childhood were theorized to heavily, if not completely, determine the fate of one's life. Erik Erikson, a student of Dr. Freud, developed a psychosocial development theory in which he mapped the eight common stages of human development, and their correlating conflicts. Erikson's work is important to this project because he is one of the first, and certainly the most renowned, theorist on the transition

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[30] George H. Pollock and Stanley I. Greenspan, eds., *The Course of Life: Vol. 5, Early Adulthood* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1993), 1.

from youth to young adulthood. Erikson's theory provides the foundation upon which many psychologists have come to understand adulthood. In Erikson's theory, young adulthood is identified between the ages of eighteen to forty years of age, and the basic conflict of this stage of development is intimacy versus isolation.

> Within this stage, "when isolation is preferred to intimacy", the young adult tends to seek "highly stereotyped and formal interpersonal relations" (formal in the sense of lacking spontaneity, warmth, and real exchange of fellowship), or he finds himself seeking intimate relations with others "in repeated attempts and repeated failures". When this is the case isolation is only reinforced, and intimacy made less possible. Isolation inhibits further development and is oftentimes symptomatic of fear of the next crisis, which involves offspring and the need to care for future generations.[31]

In his psychosocial dynamic theory, Erikson shows that young adults are looking for authentic relationships, and a failure to develop these authentic relationships can lead them to isolation. The failure to establish authentic/intimate relationships within the church may explain why so many young adults isolate themselves from the church. If the church cannot be trusted, and its constituents are hypocritical, judgmental and insensitive, how could young adults form a meaningful relationship with the church? While this presents a great vice for the church, it also uncovers a great opportunity for the church with young adults. The church should be a place of intimacy and authenticity. Psychosocial theory tells us that young adults are looking for authentic relationships, which may explain the lure of fraternities, sororities, college clubs, cliques and even gangs. Young adults are looking for a place to belong where they will be supported, loved, encouraged and part of something. The church has its best opportunities in

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[31] J. Eugene Wright, *Erickson: Identity and Religion* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1982), 92.

attracting young adults when it seeks to promote its desire for intimate/authentic relationships with young adults. Additionally, the church must be the agent that leads young people to establish intimate relationships with God that are not clouded by "unanswered questions", "traditionalism" and "theological practices" that make no sense and are non-biblical. Part of the lure of hip hop music for young people is that it is raw and real. They feel connected to the artist in the way previous generations were connected to their pastor. Hip hop music creates an intimate relationship with young people with its realness. The church can learn from this realness and attract young people at a pace greater than hip hop, because the church has the eternal truth of Jesus Christ. The church must becomes unafraid of young adults and willing to teach them, embrace them, and love them without being judgmental, condemnatory or overly critical.

The understanding of the importance of intimacy/authenticity for young adult ministry has been studied since the 1970s. The quest for intimacy may be deeper for this generation than previous generations. Lander Beal, in his book *Ministry with Young Adults in the Local Church*, states:

> This generation places a greater premium on interpersonal relationships than on occupational or professional advancement, greater stress on the power of love than on the power of wealth, more concern for human dignity than for social and professional status. This generation is untied in its rejection of sham, pretense and phoniness in personal relationships and in institutions. The great stress on the value of authenticity may be its deepest concern. This generation responds positively to those persons who are honest, sincere, authentic, and cool under stress.[32]

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[32] Lander L. Beal, *Ministry with Young Adults in the Local Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Church, 1973), 16-17.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a well-known psychological theory created by Abraham Maslow in the early 1940s. This theory, which was first published in the *Psychological Review*, was entitled "A Theory of Human Motivation".[33] In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, there are five stages: Physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Unlike Erikson's developmental theory, Maslow's theory is not identified by age, but rather one moves to the next level once the needs of the previous level have been met. For example, once a person's physiological needs have been met (food, water, etc.), then the individual can move to working on their needs for safety (employment, morality, etc.).

Maslow's theory is important in the discussion on young adults because as young adults transition from childhood to adulthood, they are essentially starting from the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In their childhood, many of their physiological needs and other needs were provided by their families of origin, even if it was at a minimal level. But once an individual enters young adulthood, there is both internal and external pressure and expectation that they begin to provide for their own needs, and this can lead to great anxiety, stress and fear. It can also be a time of great enthusiasm, excitement and hope. In either case, this transition period is very significant and can greatly occupy the attention of young adults who are seeking to create their autonomy.

In the process of negotiating their needs, young people may make decisions that are counter to their parents' wishes, and may certainly make decisions that are anti-

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[33] A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-96.

church/religious ethos. For example, a young adult may decide to become roommates with someone of the opposite sex. This is an act that would most likely be frowned upon by a church and lead to judgment against the young adult. This can create a fall out, whereby young adults do not want to be condemned or judged by the church for their decisions. Therefore, they simply avoid the church until they feel like they have everything together.

Unfortunately, most churches do very little to assist young adults in this critical time of their lives, but are quick to be critical of young adults when they make decisions that are not in line with church practices. Young adults who are often knowledgeable of the mistakes and shortcomings of those church leaders and parishioners who are judging them begin to view the church as hypocritical in its lack of understanding and mercy in their situation.

Young Adulthood

Theorists, such as Gail Sheehy, have suggested that within the young adulthood stages there are "mini-stages of development. The first stage is identified as 'pulling up roots'".[34] She states, "The tasks of this passage are to locate ourselves in a peer group role, a sex role, an anticipated occupation, an ideology or worldview. As a result, we gather the impetus to leave home physically and the identity to begin leaving home

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[34] Gail Sheehy, *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1977), 30-32.

emotionally."[35] Therefore, in young adulthood, one of the most important factors in healthy development is belonging. This agrees with Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which states that young adults are looking for intimacy or they move towards isolation. The church should capitalize on this need of young adults to belong and make our churches attractive places in which young adults receive the intimacy they yearn for.

Sheehy states that following the "pulling up roots" stage of young adulthood is a second stage, which she calls the "trying twenties". She explains,

> Our focus shifts from the interior turmoils of late adolescence – "Who am I?" "What is truth?" – and we become almost totally preoccupied with working out the externals "How do I put my aspirations into effect?" "What is the best way to start?" Where do I go? Who can help me? How did you do it? In this period…to shape a dream, that vision of ourselves which will generate energy, aliveness, and hope. To prepare for a lifework. To find a mentor if possible. And to form the capacity for intimacy, without losing in the process whatever consistency of self we have thus far mustered.[36]

In this second stage, Sheehy raises two very important features of young adulthood that can become major building blocks for the church to retain and recruit young adults. First, Sheehy says that young people are shaping their vision of what they want to do with their lives. This is a very important time in life, and the right support and guidance during this period of life can greatly enhance the quality of life experienced by these young adults. Major decisions concerning vocation, family, education, purpose and lifestyle are all being developed by young adults, and the church should be very aggressive in its pursuit of young adults in their "trying twenties" to insure the health of

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Larry A. LeFeber, *Building a Young Adult Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1980), 30-31.

our communities and world. Making bad decisions in this stage of life can lead to single-parent families, poor parenting skills, secular lifestyles, delayed/arrested development and extended adolescence.

Additionally, in the "trying twenties", Sheehy suggests that young adults may be more open to looking for a mentor. If young adults are looking for mentors, the church should be very aggressive in positioning itself to be the primary entity within all respective communities that young adults can acquire the mentoring they seek. Unfortunately, the church has all too often watched from the sidelines as many young adults have found people outside the church and the Christian faith to be the most responsive persons offering mentorship. Young people are very open during this period of their development and are more susceptible to persons who introduce ideas and beliefs that contradict Christian mores. Having a Christian mentor can give young people a supportive voice to help them negotiate the new information they are being presented with, especially information that may be counter to their Christian upbringing.

In Sheehy's third stage, she labels it as the "catch 30". In this stage of young adulthood, she states that "the self takes on a greater value".[37] Young adults in their thirties become very conscious of their need to provide, protect, and prosper in their roles as workers, parents, friends and people. This stage of development for young adults is a great opportunity for the church, as the church can appropriately guide young adults into insuring that their beliefs and behaviors are aligned with God's Word, thereby helping them become the best of who God has called them to be.

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[37] Ibid., 31.

In the three stages presented in Sheehy's theory of adulthood, we discover that there are great opportunities for the church to engage young adults. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the church seemed to be preparing itself to engage the young adults that were flooding churches. However, over time, it appears that churches have taken young adults for granted, and the general assumption that young people were "just going to keep showing up" has not fared well. As our world has become more technological and young adults have garnered more social outlets and social mobility, young adults have found other persons and institutions to provide those things that the church has not. In fact, it appears that David Kinnaman might correctly be asserting that the problem of young adults missing in our churches is not that young adults have left the church, but rather that the church has left young adults.[38]

Research has advanced many theories suggesting that there are major differences in pedagogy and andragogy. It is important to study how adults learn if the church will be effective in retaining the young adults it presently has or seeks to recruit. One theorist, Jerold Apps, has written a very important book entitled *How to Improve Adult Education in Your Church*. Apps suggests seven important guidelines for churches that I believe will be important for this project.

The first guideline given by Apps as a necessary component for adult learning within our churches is the "focus of learning must be on the individual". He states, "Education starts with asking 'What are the needs of this person?' The focus of learning cannot be on the group leader for he's only one of many resources to the learner, the focus can't be on the subject matter or the learning materials either…it must be on the

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[38] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 116.

potential learner."[39] This would be a major departure from the way most churches currently instruct their parishioners, where the instruction generally focuses on the instructor and the content. Making the individual the focus of learning in churches can greatly provide the intimacy and mentorship that our previous theories have revealed are important for young adults.

The second guideline for adult learning given by Apps is that the "focus must be on the whole person". He states, "We must be willing to deal with both the emotional and the intellectual aspects of learning at the same time. We must be willing to consider the emotions, feelings, hates and loves individuals have at the same time that we deal with ideas and facts."[40] Young adults are in a stage of transition, and their new independence can cause great anxiety, stress and social pressure. Therefore, learning for this group must focus on the "whole person", as the young adult is in the process of making decisions that will impact their whole lives. This calls for uniquely gifted instructors who will need to be understanding, caring, open and gentle in their leadership. Apps explains,

> It's not easy for a person to give up old ways of thinking about something and change. It's not easy for a person to discover that something he thought for years was fact is untrue. And it's not easy for a person to be open and free to express his inner thoughts about himself in relation to what is being discussed. Though at times it may be painful to the person, it's in unpleasant situations that real learning takes place. The result isn't a shallow learning with memorization of unrelated facts. When the whole person is involved in the learning process, the person is most apt to change. And change…is what learning is all about.[41]

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[39] Jerold W. Apps, *How To Improve Adult Education in Your Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 33.

[40] Ibid., 34.

[41] Ibid., 35.

The third guideline given by Apps states, "The learner must be actively involved." Young adults do not want to be preached at, nor are they willing to simply accept everything being dictated to them. According to Apps, young adults have energy, their own thoughts and a desire to be a part of something. Apps states, "There are three types of involvement: (1) making decisions about what is to be learned (help guide what will be learned), (2) involvement in the learning process itself (learning by doing), and (3) making decisions about whether or not learning took place (were their goals met)."[42] Young adults must be involved in these three ways for them to thrive within churches.

The fourth guideline is "the leader must be willing to take risks". Apps states, "The learner will make mistakes, there will be failures. Mistakes should not be seen as catastrophies, but as opportunities."[43] As young adults are making major decisions about their lives, the leader must understand that there will be failures. Failure is a necessary part of success, but far too often churches seem to be less than merciful. The church would do well to remember, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). When these failure come, even as major as they may seem, young adults are looking for someone who will be understanding and supportive, while still pushing them to be better. Being judgmental or overly critical of young adults will only push them away from the church, and possibly lead them to rejecting God.

The fifth guideline according to Apps is that the "learner is seen as an idea source". Apps states, "When learners feel they're free to participate in the learning situation, and when they feel trust exists, then they are most apt to share their

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[42] Ibid., 35-37.

[43] Ibid., 38.

experiences. Adult education leaders should strive for this type of sharing atmosphere."[44] Churches must make it safe for young adults to discuss issues such as homosexuality, dating, tattoos, piercings, sex and other issues that are pertinent to them. Research has shown that young adults do not feel safe discussing these issues in the church, and they have, therefore, turned to media and other outlets. This generation is an informational sharing generation. They communicate via text, blogs, vlogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and much more, which are all mediums that encourage sharing and make the learner an idea source. Television has even employed these techniques to engage young adults, as popular shows like American Idol now allow television viewers to call in to vote for their favorite artists. Nike presently encourages customers to present designs to make custom shoes. The business world has accepted that young adults want to be a part of the process. The church must follow suit.

The sixth guideline for adult learning is to clearly communicate to instructors and adult learners that "confrontation is permitted". We know that young adults are going to ask some hard questions concerning their faith, and instructors and churches should not shy away from these questions, nor offer shallow reasoning. Churches must do a better job in educating instructors for this population who can appropriately and thoroughly answer the questions young adults may have concerning life and their faith. Apps states, "The learning atmosphere must be willing to accept differing opinions. The idea that for every problem there must be a right or wrong answer must be abolished…there must be

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[44] Ibid.

room for many ideas, some of which will be in direct opposition to one another."[45] This should not require the church to compromise the Word of God. It simply suggests that the church should create an atmosphere where constituents are not ostracized or penalized for having differing opinions.

The final guideline for adult learning is to understand that "the process of learning is as important as the content of learning". This final guideline uncovers an important point about young adulthood – it is a process. As young adults are transitioning from young adulthood into adulthood, their opinions and positions on varying issues will change. Instructors of young adults should not be discouraged by lessons their students do not get immediately. Instead, the instructors should focus on the process of growth in which they are leading their adult learners, understanding that greatness is rarely established in one day. Apps states, "Thus one goal we should work toward is helping learners learn the process of learning, helping learners recognize which approaches to learning work best for them, helping learners become comfortable with problem solving approaches, helping learners identify their problems and needs, helping learners evaluate solutions to their problems so they can select the one solution which best fits them."[46]

These seven guidelines of adult learning are important theoretical pillars for the design of efforts within churches that seek to recruit and retain young adults. Writers from both the Focus on the Family and Barna Groups, propose program designs for churches that align with Apps theories on adult learners.

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[45] Ibid., 40.

[46] Ibid., 41.

While most churches would agree that young adults are missing from their worship services, some researchers suggest that churches should not panic, because teens and young adults often "disappear" from churches, but return once they are in their thirties. A Gallup Poll study entitled "The Religiosity Cycle" indicates, "Teens are more religious during their early teen years and…religiosity begins to decline as teens near adulthood."[47] While only 32% of eighteen to twenty-nine year olds reported attending church in the past seven days, that figure rises to 44% among fifty to six-four year olds and 60% among those who are seventy-five and older.[48] Researchers have used statistics like these to demonstrate that the absence of millennials from church services is a normal phenomenon and does not denote the death of the church, as the statistics seem to indicate that they will return to church later in life. Other researchers have stated that it is important for young adults to be engaged in the church, as these are the critical years of their lives and they should make decisions for their respective lives under divine direction. The issue is not about church membership, but rather salvation, which is an interesting dynamic at the center of the debate concerning young adult absenteeism in the church. Churches must seek to recruit and retain young adults, not for economic purposes or for the sake of having their pews full in the future, but because there is a genuine interest in insuring that Jesus Christ is in the center of our hearts, families, communities, nation and world.

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[47] George H. Gallup, Jr., "The Religiosity Cycle," *Gallup.com*, June 4, 2002, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.gallup.com/poll/6124/religiosity-cycle.aspx.

[48] Ibid.

Many quality studies have revealed the impact of religion on the quality of life. In the *Journal of Happiness Studies: An Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being*, Abbott L. Ferriss published a study entitled "Religion and the Quality of Life", in which he used "subjective and objective indicators of the quality of life to test relationships with religious involvement, participation and belief".[49]

> The social ties formed through church and temple contacts and other behavioral factors such as "stress and coping resources reduce the chance of death". They found the benefits of religious attendance stood the test of various causes of death. In addition, the effect of religious attendance held even after statistically controlling for the possible effects of age, sex, race and region, of activity of limitation, self-reported health and reported bed days, of income and education, of marital status and other social ties, and of behavioral risk factors such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and overweight (body mass index). Thus, religious involvement extends the length of life.[50]

The benefits of church attendance are never-ending, while the consequences of an unchurched generation can be life-ending. Jesus Christ provides hope, especially to an urban minority generation that struggles with fatalism. Churches must be intentional in creating programs, curricula, practices and protocols in which young adults feel welcome and wanted. The church has frequently reinvented itself throughout its history in order to reach people of varying cultures, races, socio-economic statuses and more. We have once again come to a crossroads, this time in which the millennial generation needs the church – not to compromise its message, but to amend its methods and strategies in order to insure that this generation does not miss Jesus.

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[49] Abbott L. Ferriss, "Religion and the Quality of Life," *Journal of Happiness Studies: An Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being* 3, no. 3 (2002): 199-215.

[50] Ibid.

In a review of most church bulletins and websites, one will often find outstanding programs for kids, teens, adults and couples, but far too often there is no program for young adults. It appears that churches across America have accepted that this generation is missing, and thereby seeks to cater only to those who are in attendance. Fortunately, there is a growing desire across Christianity to win back the souls and service of young adults, which has prompted a revival of interest in young adult religious education. The methods being employed to attract and educate young adults vary greatly, and this is important, as this generation probably more than most will not prescribe to a one-size-fits-all approach. While some churches have either converted into "hip hop churches" or incorporated urban music into their sermons and weekly services, others have created special Bible studies, retreats and even "church within a church" approaches in which a separate worship service is held weekly that completely caters to the young adult population. Harley Atkinson, in his book entitled *Handbook of Young Adult Religious Education*, suggests that every church should insure that it has a young adult religious education program. Atkinson gives the following four reasons for the importance of churches having an education program for young adults:

> (1) Young adults comprise a growing and influential people group; (2) Early adulthood is a stage of life when individuals tend to drop out of church and religious education. At the same time, young adulthood (late twenties) is the time when a large number of these dropouts return to the church; (3) Understanding and ministering to young adults is not a simple task. A young adult ministry is not simply an extension of the youth group, a college and career group or a single adults ministry…This age group is diverse and varies – including collegians, single adults (of various sorts), newlyweds, parents and members of ethnic groups. Churches must know how to target specific needs of the various types of young adults in their congregations; (4) In many ways, young adults are a troubled age group facing critical issues, not the least of which are

> skyrocketing divorce rate and shaky marriages…A strong religious education program can go a long way in effectively meeting the critical needs of young adults through varieties of small groups, seminars, retreats, counseling and classes.[51]

The research suggests that churches that seek to recruit and retain young adults will not be able to simply bundle them into its existing programs. Churches will need to either develop or purchase curricula that are appropriate for young adults. While there is a wealth of resources for the religious education of kids, teens and adults, the resources for young adults is very limited and often lacks the "realness" and "relevancy" that young adults are seeking concerning the intersection of their faith and life. There is a need for more diverse availability of evidence-based models, curricula and resources that churches can utilize.

In addition to the need for more resources, the research suggests that young adults may prefer a setting different from Sunday morning worship services in order to learn about Jesus. Therefore, the work of ministering to young adults will be "extra" work for pastors and parishioners, who far too often already feel overworked and overwhelmed. What will be the incentive for churches to create young adult education programs if it is going to add to an already overloaded plate? The answer to this question may be found in young adults' preferred medium of communication technology. Any efforts, such as sessions that are guided by educational DVDs, podcasts or other technologically driven resources, can make the job much easier for pastors and lay leaders. The ease of implementation may reduce the insecurity many churches and church leaders experience

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[51] Harley Atkinson, *Handbook of Young Adult Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1995), 5.

when thinking of ministering to young adults, especially for congregations that have more elderly parishioners.

The church will not be able to reach this new generation with old methods. It must be "new wine in new wineskins". As we come to understand more of who this generation is, church leadership must be creative without ever compromising God's Word. This generation wants the Lord; we simply need to share God in a way that they can hear and receive our Lord and Savior on their level. Meeting this generation where they are will lead them to not only attend church, but becoming fervent servants in our local churches.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Churches are under incredible pressure. As denominations throughout America scramble to retain membership and attract new parishioners, the church is witnessing a mass departure of one of its most important groups – young people. Young people are leaving the church for a myriad of reasons. The Barna Group, which has done extensive research on this mass departure of young people from the church, raises five myths concerning why young Christians drop out of church, which includes "Myth #1: Most people lose their faith when they leave high school".[1] The research breaks young Christians who have left the church into three categories: prodigals (those who grew up in Christianity and lost faith), nomads (those who don't abandon the faith but leave the institutional church) and exiles (those who want to change the world, but often feel like their radical ideals conflict with church culture). The director of the Barna Group research, David Kinnaman, says:

> The reality of the dropout problem is not about a huge exodus of young people from the Christian faith. In fact, it is about the various ways that young people become disconnected in their spiritual journey. Church leaders and parents cannot effectively help the next generation in their spiritual development without

[1] "Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts," *Barna Group*, November 16, 2011, accessed November 1, 2012, http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts.

> understanding these three primary patterns. The conclusion from the research is that most young people with a Christian background are dropping out of conventional church involvement, not losing their faith.[2]

While it is disappointing that many young people are abandoning the "traditional church", it is very promising that young people are not leaving the Christian faith. This suggests that the church can make adaptations in its governance, its presentation and its processes to draw young people back into the church. Many young people believe the church is completely disconnected from the "real world".[3] It is a generation that views itself and the world radically different from its racially, economically and socially segregated forbearers. This generation strongly believes in uniqueness, unity and equality, which unfortunately are principles that are not heavily advanced in the traditional church. New Age religions and non-denominational churches often emphasize uniqueness, unity and equality and are often viewed as more attractive for young people, thereby becoming places of refuge for many young believers. The issue with their departure is that New Age churches preach diversity and inclusion, but often teach self-help philosophies and scientific theories that are not biblically based or rooted in sound theology, and thereby lead young people away from an authentic relationship with God. The traditional church has an awesome opportunity to evolve into recognizing that the same core principles of uniqueness, unity and equality that young people are seeking are

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[2] Ibid.

[3] "Six Reasons Young People Leave the Church," *Barna Group*, September 28, 2011, accessed November 1, 2012, http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church.

key theological revelations within the early history of the Christian church, especially Methodism and the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Contributions of Methodism

"In each new age, to each generation, the church must strive to make its message heard and understood. This requires flexibility and the disposition to change in order to be faithful in the proclamation of the Word…To each generation the church must find the way to be the 'church'."[4] Unfortunately, the mission and vision of organizations often gets lost within the daily concerns of the organization. Churches have not been exempt from this truth. In this technological and informational age, churches have often found themselves competing versus co-existing with other institutions, which has led many churches to abandoning practices that have anchored them throughout time as they seek to do new things to keep parishioners. While change is important, there are foundational practices that Methodism cannot afford to lose.

Methodism was founded by John and Charles Wesley and the roots of the denomination are traced back to them as young people attending Oxford. As students, the Wesleys founded the "Holy Club" where they met weekly and encouraged living methodical lives, which led them to later being called "Methodist". As Methodism grew, leaders like George Whitfield spread an "unorthodox ministry of itinerant open-air

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[4] Paul F. McCleary, *To Serve the Present Age: Methodism's Quest to be Faithful* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2009), 168.

preaching".[5] "Wesleyan institutions, whether hospitals, orphanages, soup kitchens or schools, historically were begun with the spirit to serve all people and to transform society."[6] Methodism was a denomination that promoted uniqueness in ministry presentation, unity within communities and the equality of all persons under God. The Wesleys promoted these principles because they saw these characteristics within the triune God they served.

"In the United States, Methodism constitutes the nation's second largest Protestant denomination."[7] However, Methodism, like the rest of the churches in America, is witnessing an alarming decrease in weekly parishioners, especially amongst young people ages eighteen through thirty. This is not the first time Methodism has faced challenges. In its early history in America, after sweeping across the nation, it soon began to lose its appeal and much of its following. Many theories have been advanced to explain this drop off, but most agree that shifts in the political and cultural climate of America have been leading factors in the decline of Methodism, and its revival has always called for Methodism to make changes for the new generations to maintain its relevance. One writer suggests,

> A Methodist radicalism for today would take our version of Christianity out into the streets in new manifestations. It would be based in shops, not sanctuaries. It

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[5] Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 249.

[6] Richard T. Hughes, *Models for Christian Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 290.

[7] Joerg Rieger and John J. Vincent, *Methodist and Radical: Rejuvenating a Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2003), 15.

> would place itself alongside the searchers of new spiritualities and New Age. Its shop window would be the contemporary "big issues" – globalization, climate change, population, migration, pollution, poverty, genetically modified foods, consumerism, lifestyle…This is not social work, or community work, or even community development. It is Christian community creation.[8]

According to Rieger and Vincent, Methodists have been departing from what made us Methodist. They assert five things that have damaged Methodist theology: (1) "Methodists have been seeking to conform with the cultural establishment,"[9] (2) "Methodists have been moving toward ecumenical alliances,"[10] (3) "We increasingly substitute for theologies based on experience, more Catholic 'theologies' based on more global or consensual perspectives,"[11] (4) "Our theology and our preaching are harmless,"[12] and (5) "We have deserted the poor."[13]

Many have sought to answer the questions surrounding Methodism's decline, especially since it was once the "largest denomination and fastest growing" in the United States. Paul McCleary, in his book *To Serve the Present Age: Methodism's Quest to be Faithful*, provides a theory called the "sect-denominational model" concerning the decline of Methodism in America. He states:

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[8] Ibid., 45.

[9] Ibid., 31.

[10] Ibid., 32.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 33.

[13] Ibid.

> This model holds that new religions tend to be doctrinally and theologically strict. As the religion grows and takes in more adherents, it also accommodates within itself a great variety of social and cultural practices. In so doing, the religion begins to assume characteristics of society, and thereby acceptability. In turn, it loses zeal and distinctiveness, blending into society."[14]

McCleary presents to us that Methodism has lost its distinctive edge and now sits amongst a plethora of churches and faiths from which any believer can choose. This distinctiveness was the blue collar workers and neglected persons it not only represented, but also comprised its body. In his exploration of the work of John Wigger, McCleary raises another theory closely related to the sect-denominational model called the "from the counter-culture to the sub-culture model". This model suggests that:

> Methodism changed from a counter-culture to a sub-culture. Methodism sought to be accepted as a part of the culture, and dropped some of the crudeness of the frontier and brackishness of a sect to become more respected and acceptable. It modified its form of worship, built high-spired churches rather than chapels, and sought an educated clergy. In so doing, Methodism ceased to be counter-culture and became a sub-culture.[15]

The revolutionary spirit of the early Methodist churches has been replaced by a spirit that seeks to blend with political, economic and social dissensions, not oppose them. By seeking to fit in, the Methodist church has hurt itself versus being the leader it was called to be.

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[14] McCleary, *To Serve the Present Age*, 2.

[15] Ibid., 3.

Rieger and Vincent argue in their book that, "In Methodism's move to the center, the margins where Methodism once was most active have lost significance."[16] They suggest that early Methodism as the offspring of John Wesley was a religion of the people that sought to extend a Christian hand to those who were poor, marginalized and down-trodden. However, they note that Methodism, like much of Christianity, had undergone a sort of "rags to riches" in which the original call to stand for justice and equality has been lost to fiscal stability and political posturing. Rieger and Vincent also state that Methodism's move from the "margins to the center" has led many churches from abandoning those things that made them attractive in their origin. They state:

> One of the major achievements of Wesley is that he expanded the traditional Anglican list of means of grace, which included prayer, Bible and Holy Communion, by adding works of mercy. This changes the conventional understanding of works of mercy to not only have an impact upon those who receive them but also on those who do them. We can no longer talk about works of mercy as "outreach" activity, by which the "haves" touch the lives of the "have-nots". Works of mercy become tools of what for lack of a better word might be called "in-reach" tools for the reformation of the church.[17]

Methodism as a doctrine and discipline within the Christian church has always addressed social issues and fought on the side of the "least of these". The church today has become an institution for and by the middle class or the "center", and those on the margins have often been left in the hands of social service agencies and government entities that now provide the services and support that were once only offered by the church. In this evolution of the Methodist church, traditions have led many Methodist

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[16] Rieger and Vincent, *Methodist and Radical*, 16.

[17] Ibid., 25.

churches to hosting holiday events for the "needy" and/or programs that become "band-aid" solutions, but no unifying voice or actions to eradicate the conditions that cause their need. Methodism will not thrive in the center; it must find its way back to the margins. "In this context, theology that begins to recognize these issues can make a tremendous difference by dealing with the challenge, by giving it the authority it deserves, and by developing new tools to rethink the Christian tradition as a whole. Here, theology in the Methodist tradition may find a new start in relation to what is already happening in many of our churches."[18]

This is a time in the church that is ripe for young people. From its inception, Christianity has been more of a movement than the creation of a new religion. The early Jews who followed Christ did not see themselves as creating a new religion; they simply saw Jesus as the fulfillment of what they and their forefathers had long been awaiting – the coming of the Messiah. Their unfailing commitment to the advancement of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus' teachings were viewed as "movements", and these movements have persisted throughout various geographical regions and eras. Tales from history reveal that most movements are led by young people. Even in America, when we examine the labor movements, civil rights movements, feminist movements, anti-war movements and even the present-day "occupy" movements, these are largely organized, facilitated, and fueled by young people. "Young people have been at the core of every social movement in history."[19] Recent history has once again affirmed this point in the

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[18] Ibid., 23-24.

[19] "Mission," *Tavis Smiley Foundation*, accessed November 28, 2013, http://www.youthtoleaders.org.

successful re-election of an African-American president with low ratings and a recession, primarily due to "young people coming together to organize and lead a movement for change"[20]. Young people have always been the greatest change agents, as their naturally rebellious energies, their belief in change and their perceived immunity to social control forces allows them to dedicate themselves fully to causes in which they believe. Organizations and institutions that constantly develop strategies to appeal to this demographic thrive, even in turbulent times. Those that do not garner the attention of this group lose relevance, lose power, and lead themselves into being obsolete.

Likewise, Methodism was advanced by the same young population that the church is losing today. Young people, who founded and led Methodism in its promotion of unique styles of ministry, unity and equality of man within the body of Christ, are integral constituents to lead Methodism back to its roots. As Methodism moves back to being counter-culture or revolutionary, it may find young people to be its most enthusiastic supporters and leaders. While, young people will not flock to arguments around homosexual marriages or abortion[21] (dividing issues our churches seem to get stuck on), many young people would join a church that fights against poverty, homelessness, under-education or stopping the violence. However, the church must understand that young people want to be heroes, world-changers and part of a movement. They do not want to attend another program, to be talked to, or talked about. However, if there is a platform for which they can use their creative energies to advance causes and

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[20] "About Young Americans," *BarackObama.com*, 2008, accessed November 28, 2013, http://www.barackobama.com/youngamericans/about.

[21] "Study: Youth see Christians as judgmental, anti-gay," *USA Today,* October 10, 2007, accessed November 28, 2013, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2007-10-10-christians-young_N.htm.

issues for which they believe, they will come. Young people want to be a part of organizations that rebel against the status quo and seek to create change. This is not a new phenomenon, as most movements including the growth of Christianity and Methodism have been both inspired and led primarily by young people who possessed this revolutionary spirit.

African Methodist Theology

Since the context of this project is within the African Methodist Episcopal Church, it is important to explore the history, theology, and the relationship between Millennial's and the AME Church. The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church, within its doctrine and disciplines, possesses many attributes that would be attractive to young people if they were implemented universally within AME churches. As a young minister, I had a big heart for God's Word and social work. To me, religion that was not improving the lives of those it preached to was a waste of time. So I quickly found a home within the African Methodist Episcopal church.

The A.M.E. church has its roots in the self-determination of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, who in response to "the unkind treatment of their white brethren, who considered them a nuisance in the house of worship, and even pulled them off their knees while in the act of prayer and ordered them back to their seats",[22] led them to forming the African Methodist Episcopal church. The A.M.E. church is the oldest African-American denomination, and has been a leader in nearly every major social movement. Pastors in

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[22] "The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church," 5.

the A.M.E. church were more than Sunday orators, but also serve as community leaders and activist. Likewise, churches were not simply gathering areas for worship and bible study, but also provided shelter, food, employment, counseling and much more. The A.M.E. church has a rich history through its "Wesleyan-Allen" roots of serving the underprivileged and leading the fight against social inequities and injustices.

> The mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is to "minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional, and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed". The church is charged to "seek out and save the lost, and serve the needy through a continuing program of (1) preaching the gospel, (2) feeding the hungry, (3) clothing the naked, (4) housing the homeless, (5) cheering the fallen, (6) providing jobs for the jobless, (7) administering to the needs of those in prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, asylums and mental institutions, senior citizens' homes; caring for the sick, the shut in, the mentally and socially disturbed, and (8) encouraging thrift and economic advancement.[23]

Within the structure of the A.M.E. church are various committees, departments and divisions designed to organize the church to satisfy the mission and work of the church. In the Articles of Religion, the first article is,

> Of Faith in the Holy Trinity – There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this God-head, there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity – the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.[24]

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[23] Ibid., 11.

[24] Ibid., 12.

The unity within God is expressed in this leading article, and unity is also a theme within the connectional and local churches. While the church is African-American in origin, it is a church for all people of all ages and backgrounds.

Within the Doctrine of the Trinity in African Methodism, we see a few themes: Distinction, unity and equality. These themes are seen within the God-head and are thereby mirrored in the beliefs and practices of African Methodism.

The Doctrine of the Trinity, Methodism and Young People

One of the most divisive issues that faced the early church has been the Doctrine of the Trinity. The advancement of the idea of a triune God led one writer to say, "When we look back through the long ages of the reign of the Trinity…we shall perceive that few doctrines have produced more unmixed evil."[25] Another writer states, "The adoption of a non-Biblical phrase at Nicea constituted a landmark in the growth of dogma; the trinity is true, since the Church – the universal Church speaking by its Bishops – says so, though the Bible does not!"[26] Jews believed in God the father, but the inference that Jesus was God and, furthermore, that the Holy Spirit exists and is also God, led many to believe that Christianity had moved from monotheism to polytheism. "Had you been born a Jew of orthodox religious parents in first century Palestine, you would have held an unshakeable conviction that there is one, and only one, supreme creator God worthy of

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[25] Norton Andrews, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrine of the Trinitarians Concerning the Nature of God and the Person of Christ* (Boston, MA: Hilliard, Gray & Co., 1833), 287.

[26] "Dogma, Dogmatic Theology," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 14th ed. (New York, NY: 1936), 501-502.

worship in the universe. This creed was inextricable woven into the fabric of Jewish life."[27] The concept of the Trinity arose out of the Doctrine of Christ, in which theologians argued that Jesus as the Messiah was both man and God. If this "two-God" theory wasn't problematic enough, the idea of the trinity certainly caused a stir amongst Jews, and even persons of other faiths. The assertion by the early shapers of our faith that God was "three in one" was a counterculture or revolutionary approach to understanding God, and while it led many to believing it was blasphemous, it also attracted many people to the Faith in the uniqueness of a personal God, the unity represented in a triune concept and the equality within the God-head.

While the Doctrine of the Trinity continues to perplex believers and theologians alike, the words of Augustine have often rung true when he stated, "Si comprehendis non est Dues: If you can get your mind around it, it cannot be God." The fact that so many people have come to Christianity despite the mystery of the Trinity suggests that people feel comfortable accepting a God that they can't fully understand or explain. In fact, God's unexplainable qualities make him even more attractive to Lord over others, as he is "higher" in power and composition than we are.

Tertullian, the great African theologian, is widely considered to be the one "responsible for the development of the distinctive Trinitarian terminology."[28] Early theologians debated Tertullian's use of the word "Trinitas", but most scholars believe it is

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[27] Anthony Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of The Trinity* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars Publications, 1998), 13.

[28] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), location 8898.

related to the term "persona". Alister McGrath, in his book, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, states:

> The term persona thus came to have a developed meaning, along the lines of the "role that someone is playing". It is quite possible that Tertullian wanted his readers to understand the idea of "one substance, three persons" to mean that the one God played three distinct yet related roles in the great drama of human redemption.[29]

These early explanations gave way to more questions, as theologians and critics argued over how these roles were played by God. Were they simply God manifesting himself to the world in different ways throughout different periods of time, as suggested by many Eastern theologians?[30] What was the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Were they equal to one another, or did the Father reign supreme and the others served as lesser figures of the God-head? As we survey these questions that were asked by theologians, the answers to these questions call our attention to the uniqueness, unity and equality within God that Wesley and Methodism challenge us to express within our Christian service. "The Doctrine of the Trinity can thus be seen as an attempt to describe faithfully a God who while remaining transcendent also became incarnate in Christ – and, more than that, now indwells believers in the Holy Spirit."[31]

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[29] Ibid., location 8886.

[30] Ibid., location 8191.

[31] Ibid., location 8039.

Uniqueness

In the early formation of the Nicean-Constantine Creed, the early Christian fathers faced serious opposition in explaining the principle of "three persons, one substance". If God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, doesn't that make God three different individuals and thus make them of different substance? William P. Alston, in his chapter "Substance and the Trinity" included in the book *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, says,

> This confusion goes back to the days of Aristotle's use of ousia both for the individual bearer of an essence and properties, and for the essential nature that makes an individual a substance…The divine unity, when put in terms of ousia, is taken to consist of the common essential (divine) nature which the three persons share.[32]

We see this distinctiveness without division within God. "The three persons of the Trinity are distinct, yet not divided (distincti non divisi), different yet not separate or independent of each other (discrete non separati)"[33] This sharing and unity, while still possessing a distinctness, is a guide for young people and the church. Young people are a very distinct group within society and certainly within our churches. Their free-spiritedness, their joking, their energy, their questioning of the world, their challenge of authority and their methods of expression are all positive attributes of their differentness. The church needs its young people, not as a division, department or separate entity, but as a formal part of the church body.

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[32] Stephen T. Davis and Daniel Kendall, *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 22-25.

[33] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, location 8019.

Today, many theories on re-engaging young people in churches have emerged. One of those theories that is being widely implemented purports that young people need their own church. In this theory, young people are so different that they can't mix with their elders. New terms within churches have arisen such as "Children's Church", "Teen Church" and "Young Adult Church" in which these young populations worship in segregation from their elder family members. At first glance, this appears to be a great resolution and attraction to bring young people into the church, as these youth worship services are often highlighted by free dress, loud and current popular music, and sermons that target their issues.

However, this separation in worship may be a grave disservice as well. There is a positive benefit and that can only come from the uniqueness of persons being blended in worship. One of the greatest characteristics of the early church was its diversity amongst groups. While God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are distinct and different personalities, they are still of one substance, undivided, thereby expressing that there is unity within God. The uniqueness of the "personas" of the God-head are celebrated, not suppressed or even lost in our faith. There is no separation and there is no hierarchy. The church should mirror the unity that is seen within God. Separations along generational lines give further credence to ecclesiastical separations along racial lines, which has also been a hindrance of social and spiritual progress within America.

There is a benefit that arises from all generations and groups worshipping alongside one another. The young people gain the benefits of the cultural and social expressions of worship of their elders, and the elders receive the same.

Unity

One of Tertullian's greatest contributions to the Doctrine of the Trinity was the term "substantia", which relates to our English word "substance". While the persons of the God-head maintain their uniqueness, they work cooperatively, collaboratively and in perfect communion with one another. McGrath says, "Substance is what the three persons of the Trinity have in common. It must not be thought of as something which exists independently of the three persons; rather it expresses their common foundational unity, despite their outward appearance of diversity."[34] In the sixth century, the Greek term "perichoresis" was widely used to describe "the manner in which the three persons of the Trinity relate to one another".[35] The term is incredibly important in our understanding of the Trinity because it "allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two…a community of being."[36] This unity within the God-head was something we see clearly throughout Jesus' ministry, as he did not relegate himself to just one population, but he sought to bring unity between the Jews and the gentiles, the rich and the poor, the sinners and the righteous. At the center of Jesus' ministry was that he taught, encouraged, and modeled unity. This unity was reflected in the early church, as the apostles lived with one another, witnessed to the world, and attracted people from varying geographical, cultural and social locations. They were effective, because they were reflective of the unity or "oneness" that is in

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[34] Ibid., location 8178.

[35] Ibid., location 8207.

[36] Ibid.

God. There is a perfect togetherness within God, a state that we must encourage within our respective churches and communities. While maintaining one's uniqueness, it does not abolish our ability to unite, and this is the great mystery of relationship with one another that can only be experienced through God.

Today's generation of young people are the most diverse and culturally open group that America has ever seen. In many respects, they do not see the world in black and white or rich and poor, but they see their world in rainbows and without social restrictions. They have moved beyond diversity to a place of understanding and acceptance. Young people want to be in churches that encourage unity, not focus on divisions. While the church must still uphold the gospel truths, it does not need to be dogmatic, oppressive or degrading. Jesus reached to the sinner, and we must do the same.

Young people in leadership positions within churches will bring this unity, and the change should be welcomed. Imagine church with a bunch of young people, some who have green hair, ear gauges, tongues pierced and tattoos, in perfect unity with those who wear suits and ties, Nordstrom dresses and designer clothes. Imagine church that is not racially segregated, but is comprised of persons of all races, varying ethnicities and cultural traditions, all praising the same God, because He is our substance. This is the unity that young people want in the world, and this is the unity that will bring them back to our churches.

Equality

As the early shapers of our faith discussed the Trinity, the question arose, "Is one greater than the other?" For some early believers, it was easy to digest God being the head, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit being lesser entities within God. However, equality with God was something that was unheard of.

> In the fourth century, the Cappadocians developed their language of the three co-equal and co-eternal hypostaseis or persons sharing the one divine ousia or essence. At the heart of God, they saw an interpersonal communion or koinonia with communion as the function of all three divine persons and not simply of the Holy Spirit. For this interpersonal model of the Trinity, God's inner being is relational, with each of the three persons totally related and transparent to the other two.[37]

Within God, there are no big "Is" and little "yous". The Father is fully God, Jesus is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God. This divine mystery presents to us that there is a uniqueness (differentness) within God, while still maintaining unity, and in this unity there is equality. The unity, therefore, is not the result of one forcing the other to comply, but rather is a natural product of the incredible significance and interrelatedness of their collective work. Tertullian and Irenaeus, introduced this idea of "mutual inter-penetration", and the work was elaborated in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa.[38] One term that helped to bring great meaning to this equality is "appropriation". This term suggested that, "every person of the Trinity is involved in every outward action of the

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[37] Ibid., location 8211.

[38] Ibid., location 8222.

God-head".[39] At any point in time, we may consider the work of one person of the God-head, but it is "appropriate" to understand that all were working cooperatively, collaboratively and in communion in every work.

"The Methodism of an anti-slavery John Wesley, as well as the America envisioned by the Declaration of Independence was predicated upon the full equality of all humankind."[40] Methodism, grew exponentially, as it promoted equality within the body of Christ. In fact, until recently, one of the most well-known mottos within the African Methodist Episcopal Church was "God our Father, Christ our Redeemer, Man our Brother". It obliterated race, socioeconomic status, sexism and oppressive ideas, and promoted equality. This provided hope and affirmation for those who were marginalized, downtrodden and disenfranchised. The belief of the early church esteemed them and brought us all as equals before the Lord.

This equality in collective work serves as an important model for the church. Young people often leave the church as they are not treated as equals in the body of Christ. A radical change is needed in the church, which must understand that children, teenagers and young adults in churches are not simply there to be talked to, but they also have a place in leading, witnessing, administrating, preaching, and worshipping. They are of no less significance than those that tithe, but are equal partners in the work of the church. Promoting equality empowers, encourages, and enhances the church.

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Stephen Angell and Anthony Pinn, *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 1.

Today's youth are deeply concerned about fairness and equality. These issues are being highly debated across the country as they relate to race, gender, class, sexual orientation and culture. This generation has benefited from the talk of erasing inequality of preceding generations and has actually evolved into those who have a strong distaste for things they perceive as being unfair. These sentiments among this generation have been the fire behind the election of an African-American president, more female elected persons in the history of the country, and recently a few openly homosexual politicians. Behind most of those elections have been young people working in the trenches, driving the principle of equality down America's throat. If churches are to reconnect and re-engage young people, they must get onboard the "equality train". This co-equality is mirrored for us in the Doctrine of the Trinity, was supremely important in the roots of Methodism, and must return for the Methodist church to survive the twenty-first century.

Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundations that support this project are Jeremiah 1:4-8 and Luke 5:33-39. Collectively, these texts identify God's call to repentance, renewal, revival and restoration, and God's usage of young people in this work. These texts also represent a challenge to the church of that respective time, to not seek to be like the world, but to be revolutionary in remembering that they are God's chosen people. The ministries of both Jeremiah and Jesus are quite similar, as they are both called to minister to a rebellious and resistant crowd, faced constant attack, and were widely unappreciated as they spoke truth to power. Both ministries called for change, challenged the dominant philosophies

of the day, and called their listeners into a more intimate relationship with God. Their methods and messages were unorthodox, and were not embraced by the spiritual leaders of their day. Despite the responses of the people, both Jeremiah and Jesus advanced the messages God gave them, in a passionate desire to breathe new life into God's people.

Jeremiah and Jesus worked cross culturally, expressed passion for the needs of the downtrodden, oppressed, and the rejected, and challenged the church/people of God to see the shallowness of their professed faith. When millennials are asked about their issues with the church of the twenty-first century, the dominant response is that the church is hypocritical and judgmental, as this generation does not see the church advancing ministries that reflect those of Jeremiah or Jesus. An understanding and return to the ministerial foundations provided by Jeremiah and Jesus, can lead young adults to return to local churches.

Like Jeremiah and Jesus, millennials love the Lord, but have an issue with the church. The research presented in chapter two demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of millennials believe in God; however, they have lost faith in the church. If the church dismisses the voices of young adults, it will make the same mistake of the churches of Jeremiah and Jesus' day, which eventually led them to self-destruction. The texts that serve as the biblical foundation for this project will identify God's unique call for young people to engage in His ministry, God's call for change and how movements for change are often best led by young people, and the need for a unified, cross-generational church.

Old Testament Foundation

As an Old Testament foundation, the researcher has chosen Jeremiah 1:4-8. The prophet Jeremiah was one of the major prophets of the Hebrew Bible. The book of Jeremiah is recognized today by all three of the world's major religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. His ministry is somewhat legitimated by the incredible trials and tribulations that marked his ministry, yet he endured to the end. Jeremiah suffered in his service to God, which has often earned him the credo "the weeping prophet". Jeremiah is credited with providing us with "spiritualized and individualized religion…and the primacy of the individual's relationship with God".[41] Jeremiah's significant contributions to our faith are highlighted for this project because of his incredible contribution to the faith despite his youthfulness, and arguably because of his youthfulness. Jeremiah is a strong example that God calls persons of all ages to lead in his church, that young people can make significant contributions to our faith, and that God often uses young people to challenge traditionalists and bring change to his people.

Jeremiah's ministry was birthed during a very tumultuous time in Israel. Despite being called a "prophet to nations", much of Jeremiah's prophecies and preaching were directed towards Judah. One writer states, "Assyria's power was crumbling and independence for Judah once more seemed a real possibility. But Jeremiah could not share in the mood of national optimism. He saw many things wrong in his nation: the people had chosen to ignore the covenant laws and would have to face the inevitable consequences of such willful disregard for the central values on which their faith was

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[41] *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 563.

based."[42] Prior to his ministry, Israel had long been divided into northern and southern kingdoms. The northern kingdom was often called Israel in scriptures, and the southern kingdom was referred to as Judah.

> Judah managed to survive longer than Israel, but its days were numbered, as it failed to engage in effective ways with superpowers like Assyria and Babylon. In spite of the warnings from prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, it was only a matter of time before Jerusalem was overrun and its people transported from their homes into exile. With Israel gone, and Samaria reduced to a heap of ashes, life in Judah changed dramatically.[43]

Jeremiah, therefore, grew up during very turbulent times, where the Word of God needed to be heard to bring change. Jeremiah belonged to a family of priests, "from Anathoth, a village located about four miles northeast of Jerusalem".[44] He was close to the political center of everything that was brewing and was called by God to foretell of the looming destruction that would come upon Judah for turning against the Lord. Jeremiah's words were doubly troubling to the people of Judah because of the content of his message, but one must also consider that his age was also an issue. It certainly was an issue for even himself, as we see in Jeremiah 1:6, in which he responds to the Lord's call by saying, "Ah, sovereign Lord,…I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." In Jeremiah 1:8, we see the real motive behind Jeremiah's initial refusal to speak for God is fear. Without saying that he is scared, God knows Jeremiah's heart, and tells him, "Do

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[42] John Drane, *Introducing the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 140.

[43] Ibid., 125.

[44] Ibid., 140.

not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you." Jeremiah is scared, and he is confident that his age will be a barrier.

However, the text reveals that Jeremiah's age was an asset, not a liability, in the work of God. God purposely chose him, as his age would have precluded him from being accepted into the religious groups of his day and limited the influence of society upon his young mind, plus his unprecedented wisdom would clearly demonstrate that his message was from God.

In Jeremiah 1:4-5, it says, "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I know you, before you were born I set you apart." These words of comfort and confirmation to Jeremiah from God imply "two things: God chose Jeremiah, and God watched over and provided for Jeremiah".[45] This provided an assurance of continuing protection and provision, which was important, especially for a "weeping prophet".

Within this call, we see the concepts of sanctification and predestination, concepts that will later be revisited by Paul in the New Testament writings to the churches. Sanctification means to "be set apart for exclusive use"[46] and is found in Jeremiah in that he was not meant to be like everyone else, but was called for a special purpose. Although he came from a family of priests, he was not called to simply assume the duties others had planned for him. Jeremiah had been called to something new, something different and something special.

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[45] Patrick Miller, *Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 587.

[46] *The New Bible Dictionary,* 496.

> The language, "I have known you" has its primary resonance with Genesis 18:19, and Amos 3:2, both of which are statements about the Lord's knowing Israel and doing so to give them a task in the world, "to keep the way of righteousness and justice will be uppermost in his preaching". So it is with the Lord's declaration to Jeremiah "I have consecrated you", "I have made you holy", echoes the designation of Israel as a "holy nation" (Exod 19:6), an understanding of Israel as set apart to the Lord....What Israel was meant to be in the beginning but has failed to be in the end is what Jeremiah is appointed to be – holy, consecrated to the Lord.[47]

Jeremiah is as an example of what the Lord has called us all to be. He was special, and he was not called to fit in, but rather to stand out. Jeremiah was a forerunner to the change that Jesus would come to bring to the world – change that could not be confined to our hopes and desires, but rather change that was rooted and dictated by grace through Jesus Christ.

Predestination refers to, "God's plan of events, and especially circumstances and destinies of people...The Bible conceives of God's purposes for people being expressed both by his commands to them (which they can obey or disobey), and by his direct ordering of their circumstances."[48] Jeremiah had been created to bring change. While he had to choose to be obedient to this calling, God ordained him for this work and had equipped him to be successful in it. In Jeremiah, we see his initial hesitation, but he later complied with God's call upon his life that he uniquely had been created for.

Likewise, many of our young people have been created with gifts, talents and a calling to bring change to our society. Recent events in America, such as the killing by

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[47] Miller, *Interpreter's Bible*, 588-589.

[48] *The New Bible Dictionary,* 446.

law enforcement of Trayvon Martin in Florida, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Eric Garner in New York and Tamir Rice in Cleveland has led to nationwide demonstrations, protests, marches and rallies being led by young adults of varying races. Even the "Occupy" movements that have formed to call notice to inequalities and corruption within the financial and political institutions of America have been led by young people. Sadly, the church has not been at the center of these movements, nor has the church presented a unified voice to stand against these injustices. Could this be the result of churches lacking its most radical voice and social justice organizers, which has been and always will be its young adult constituents? These young leaders face the same travails faced by Jeremiah, but just as Jeremiah's message was needed in his day, we need the message of our modern day "Jeremiahs" and the unique message that Christ has anointed them to give to the body of Christ.

The danger is not only that the church is missing millennials, and therefore missing its radical voice and relevance, but young adults are suffering as well. The counter-demonstrations around the country have shown that this is a generation that is angry, hurt and seeking answers. Like Jeremiah who "suffered", they will need God's guidance, encouragement, strength and wisdom in order to maintain the fight against inequities and injustice. A lack of relationship with God can lead millennials into a deeper state of trauma, disillusionment, depression and dysfunction that can be destructive for the entire nation. While Jeremiah struggled with doing the work God called him to do, he persevered because of his relationship with God.

Called as a young boy, Jeremiah felt ill-equipped and inadequate for the work of God. However, "The divine call does not come out of some recognition of talent or

particular piety or readiness for prophetic vocation."[49] God calls whomever he chooses, regardless of race, age, ethnicity or economic background, and just as God cannot be limited, those He chooses also are not limited to man's categories or presumptions. It would behoove the contemporary church to remain mindful of this fact, as the changes that Generation X and Y bring to the modern church may be God's choosing to keep the church from destruction. The elder leaders of the church must be careful to not act like those of Jeremiah's day and fail to heed the message of God, in large part because of the age of the messenger.

One author, who has been studying young people and spirituality, explains how elder exposure to young adults and vice versa is truly valuable:

> Erik Erikson was a psychoanalyst who built his bio-psycho-social theory of human development on the work of Freud. Erikson (1964) suggests that we and our children meet at our own particular age or stage of development even as we interactively move each other along. He terms this interactive process "cogwheeling". By this term, Erikson suggests an image of two (or more) intermeshed wheels, the cogs of which are in the closest of proximity, and without which proximity neither cog would turn. Erikson's image of "cogwheeling" helps us understand that our relationships with children are interactive and that children are not the only ones engaged in the development process.[50]

This author understands the importance of elders and young people working collaboratively in the development process. One is deprived and will ultimately be ineffective if it seeks to develop without the other. This theory illustrates the importance of diversity and unity, and certainly is something needed by our churches today. We can

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[49] Miller, *Interpreter's Bible*, 581.

[50] Erik Erikson, *The Erik Erikson Reader* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2000), 221-222.

only imagine the possibilities for Israel had they listened to Jeremiah and heeded his warnings. The church's loss of young people is a warning. Will this warning be heard?

"Jeremiah's objection is rejected by God…Jeremiah's worries are deemed irrelevant because the issue is not what he can or cannot do, but that his activity is totally under the initiative of God."[51] Jeremiah was not excused out of his responsibility, but was told that he would be empowered to do the work by God himself. The challenges Jeremiah faced due to his age or even the rebelliousness of those he spoke to provided no "easy out" for Jeremiah in God's eyes. Jeremiah was not called to control outcomes, he was simply called to do what he was created to do. Likewise, young people who have been called by God will not be excused from the work God has sanctified and predestined them to accomplish. Young people must do what God has called them to do, and let God handle the rest. On the surface, this appears to be a lot of weight upon the shoulders of those who are young. However, it speaks to God's power upon those who otherwise would be unprepared and inadequate for service.

New Testament Foundation

The church today is struggling to develop strategies and answers to explain and address the mass exodus of millennials from organized worship. Some churches have prematurely jumped to the conclusion that millennials are not interested in church or God and their exodus from the church is symptomatic of their immorality. This unfounded assumption has been challenged by many, as the research fails to demonstrate that this

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[51] Miller, *Interpreter's Bible*, 586.

generation has any less desire for God than previous generations. In fact, James Jones in his book *Filled With New Wine: The Charismatic Renewal of the Church*, says:

> Young people are the seismographs of society, then what is happening in the church is a tremor symptomatic of something happening throughout the culture. Many young persons are searching for a renewal of the basic experiences of life and faith. This drive, which has overpopulated our university courses in religion, has taken some back to nature, others deep into the contemplative cells of Eastern religions or down into the depths of drug-induced consciousness. In all this one sees a strong impulse to get down to the experiential roots of what we say and do and believe.[52]

With the understanding that these younger generations do desire God, but are looking for "newer" experiences within the church, many independent churches and denominations have developed "Teen Churches" and/or "Young Adult Churches" with contemporary music, liberal dress codes and age-appropriate messages that provide alternatives for these generations. Some churches have argued for the complete abandonment of age-old religious views and practices, while others have vehemently opposed all ideas and proposals to contemporize their worship space, practices, beliefs and experiences. These tensions have left the church struggling for answers concerning change, as they all seek to be obedient to Jesus.

Jones writes, "What we have in the church today is plenty of new wineskins, and no new wine to pour into them."[53] In fact, this researcher discovered that the scripture

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[52] James Jones, *Filled With New Wine: The Charismatic Renewal of the Church* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1974), 20.

[53] Jones, *Filled With New Wine*, 3.

most often referred to when discussing change within the church most often leads to Jesus' parable concerning "new wine in new wineskins". Jones continues:

> To renew, as the word implies, is not to create out of nothing, but rather to revitalize what has always been there. When I speak of the spiritual renewal of the church, I do not imply that the Spirit is somehow gone from it and has to be reintroduced. The Spirit has never been absent from the church. However, at times the church's awareness appears dim, and the attention it gives to the Spirit is consequently lessened. Right after the day of Pentecost, the early church was keenly aware of the Spirit. Examining the evidence of that time may give a clue as to what life in the Spirit might be like, and what happens when people are responsive to it.[54]

Therefore, Jones views new wine and new wineskins as a conversation about renewal versus the creation of something altogether new or resisting what is new. To explore what Jesus might say to the church concerning its current challenges with its younger generations, we will turn to this parable in hopes of unlocking God's process towards change.

The parable of the new wine appears in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew 9:14-17, Mark 2:21-22 and Luke 5:33-39), however the details, the context and even the meaning/purpose for each gospel's telling of this parable varied greatly. For the purpose of this project, the researcher will highlight the Lukan text, as it builds upon the base provided in the Markan text, addresses the concerns raised in the Matthean text, and then provides some new insight to complete the message.

While some essential elements of the story seemingly remained the same across the gospels, each writer used the story to project their own messages that they felt were relevant to their respective audiences. Without doubt, the parable in the three synoptic

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[54] Ibid., 22-23.

gospel accounts spoke of change; however, great issues arose as one sought to decipher how Jesus envisioned this change taking place. On the surface, it appeared that this parable had singular meaning; however, close study of the text revealed that there was most likely an intended plurality in Jesus' use of this parable. It is, therefore, possible that each gospel writer highlighted a particular aspect of Jesus' message in their parable, and each writer could be correct in the message they shared with their respective readers and none of the messages contradicted the others. This is the power of the Word of God in its ability to speak to our own understanding. The negation of contradiction between the gospel writers might have been purposely addressed by Luke in the writing of the book of Acts, in which he stated in Acts 2:1-13:

> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a noise like a strong, blowing wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something like flames of fire that were separated and stood over each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak different languages by the power the Holy Spirit was giving them. There were some religious Jews staying in Jerusalem who were from every country in the world. When they heard this noise, a crowd came together. They were all surprised, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were completely amazed at this. They said, "Look! Aren't all these people that we hear speaking from Galilee? Then how is it possible that we each hear them in our own languages? We are from different places: Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappodocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the areas of Libya near Cyrene, Rome (both Jews and those who had become Jews), Crete, and Arabia. But we hear them telling in our own languages about the great things God has done!" They were all amazed and confused, asking each other, "What does this mean?" But others were making fun of them, saying, "They have had too much wine."

We immediately notice Luke's reference again to wine in the text in Acts, and its association with the "amazement and confusion" being experienced by those who were seeking to understand what they were seeing. In the parable of the new wine, likewise,

there is amazement at the miracles he had recently performed in the "casting out of demons", "healing of many people", "the amazing catch of fish by the first disciples at Jesus' command", "healing a man with leprosy" and "the healing of a paralytic". Undoubtedly, the people were amazed and word must have spread about this amazing man that liberates, heals, and provides in the name of God. However, there was also confusion surrounding Jesus, as he immediately followed these amazing acts with doing things that were completely against the religious tradition by calling a tax collector to be a disciple, eating amongst sinners, and failing to make his disciples observe fasting rituals. Jesus' actions and words were both amazing and appalling, they inspired hope and hate, they encouraged reform and rebuke, they spoke of separation and collaboration, but most importantly sanctification and damnation.

It is often amazing and confusing how two people can attend the same church service, hear the same songs, participate in the same liturgy, hear the same sermon, and yet leave church with completely different messages gained from their spiritual encounter. As a pastor, the researcher has often been amazed by the messages within a particular sermon that one might hold onto that another didn't hear at all. The researcher has discovered that our experience with God has a lot to do with the circumstantial, emotional, psychological and social place that we are in our respective lives. The same must be true for the audiences of the gospel writers. Therefore, each writer had carefully crafted their telling of this early confrontation of Jesus with the Pharisees, and the structure, slant, style and substance they highlighted in their story was a reflection of their personal and their audiences' circumstantial, emotional, psychological and social location. Reading the new wine accounts with this understanding provides the reader with

a deeper and more comprehensive insight into Jesus' words concerning "change" and may shed incredible light upon our discussion of how to best facilitate and accommodate the changes needed within our churches today.

In all three accounts of the parable of the new wine, new wineskins, the parable arose in response to Jesus' call of a tax collector, Levi, to come follow Him, and subsequent questions and challenges posed to Jesus by those around him concerning his disciples' failure to observe the traditional rules of fasting. Within the context, we understand that Jesus and his "new school" followers were breaking the codes of tradition, and while some may want to give credence to Jesus' ministry, there was a serious issue from various groups concerning Jesus' lack of adherence to tradition. Surprisingly, this reservation was not held by just one group, but the different gospel accounts revealed that this was an issue for nearly everyone around Jesus. For example, in Mark we are told that the persons that question Jesus' disciples about not fasting were a group of people comparing Jesus against the "followers of John" and the Pharisees. John the Baptist is a perennial figure in the time of Jesus, and even as his cousin, we find Jesus' ministry and the ministry of John the Baptist completely separate. Historian and theologian Justo Gonzalez writes, "The New Testament and Josephus both describe John's work as a call to the people to put their lives in order so that they would be morally fit to meet the Messiah who was to establish God's new way of being."[55] Gonzalez goes on to state:

> The radical nature of John's message and especially the opposition that he provoked comes into clear focus when we understand that he was calling people

[55] Justo Gonzalez, *Luke* (Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox Press, 2010), 580.

> who regarded themselves as already full members of the people of God to undergo a rite [baptism] that they would have regarded as appropriate only for those who were previously unbelievers. In John's view, even faithful Jewish believers needed some far-reaching change of heart if they were to play their full part in the new society that the Messiah was about to announce. They too would need to begin all over again, just as if they were gentile people getting to know God for the first time.[56]

The fact that Jesus was being compared to the habits and practices of John's followers shows that even John's followers had missed the message. While John challenged religious leaders like the Pharisees to prepare themselves for the coming of Jesus, John in no way was suggesting that Jesus would be a part of one group or another. Despite John's message concerning a "new way" and a "new society", the people were still looking for the new Messiah to amalgamate into one of the existing structures.

In the writings of Josephus, we learn that, "Jewish philosophy takes three forms. The followers of the first school are called Pharisees, of the second Sadducees and the third sect, which has a reputation for being more disciplined, is the Essenes."[57] Of these three groups, Pharisees were by far the largest and the most influential group of Jesus' time, and "they were highly regarded by most ordinary people".[58] This is in sharp contradiction for many of us today, which led Gonzalez to conclude, "We tend to think of [Pharisees] as synonymous with 'hypocrite'. This is in part because we look at the Pharisees through the lens of the Gospel stories, and in part because we do not wish to admit how much like those Pharisees we are. Amongst the various Jewish sects and

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[56] Ibid., 324-325.

[57] Drane, *Introducing the Bible*, 310.

[58] Ibid., 312.

groups, the Pharisees were the most worthy of respect."[59] Gonzalez goes on to state, "So the Pharisees are good, sincere, religious people. And they are disturbed that this man Jesus eats with unworthy, unclean people. That he does such a thing seems to invalidate his ministry and his authority. They have every right to criticize Jesus, who is certainly not acting as a good religious person out to act."[60]

Therefore, when we look at Mark's account of the parable of new wine, new wineskins, we see Jesus being compared against the two groups that most would believe the Messiah would certainly be a part of and that would comply with their traditions. Further, Mark showed that John's disciples and the Pharisees were apparently keeping close watch of Jesus' ministry, and possibly were believing in the things they had seen and heard in him, but were bothered by his other acts that completely defied their traditions and moral codes. As we see later, Mark's theology concerning the parable of new wine, new wineskins differed from the other gospel writers because of who he was addressing and what he was addressing. In Mark's account of the parable, Jesus' response was tough and straight-to-the- point, as he was making it clear that He had not come to fit in or be a part of any group, but had come to give the world something "new and greater" than the "ritualism and piety" that the Pharisees espoused or even the political radicalism for which John's disciples yearned. Ultimately, Mark told us that Jesus was greater than denominations, greater than our own divisions, and bigger than the categories and areas in which we sought to confine him.

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[59] Gonzalez, *Luke*, 84-85.

[60] Ibid., 85.

In the Matthean account, Jesus was not questioned by the Pharisees or others comparing him to the cliques of the day, but instead by John's disciples. Differing from the Markan account, Matthew presented the questions around fasting coming from John the Baptist's followers, suggesting that even the radical parties still adhered to the traditional practices and believed them as essential to worship. They showed themselves to be a group that had sought to mix old wine into new wineskins. They observed and kept the practices of the Pharisees, but they desired a different leadership and structure, as they viewed the current leadership as corrupt. Their true objective was greater political power and liberation from Roman rule. Matthew targeted these believers in his account of Jesus' parable of new wine and new wineskins in an aim to show them that radicalism and revolution in themselves were not the answers. They were looking for God to liberate the Jews, but instead Matthew sought to introduce his readers to Jesus who had come to preserve or save everyone.

In the Lukan text, Jesus' disciples were questioned by the Pharisees. The comparison was once again made with John the Baptists' disciples, but Luke in his final answer gave us a different rebuke from Jesus than Mark or Matthew. In Mark, the disciples of Jesus were compared by others against John the Baptist's disciples and Pharisees. In Matthew, the disciples of Jesus were questioned by followers of John the Baptist. In Luke, Jesus' disciples were questioned by the Pharisees. Each of the predominant groups had expressed their expectations of the Messiah, but it was in Luke that we got our most comprehensive answer. Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark, connected the calling of Levi with the questions surrounding fasting via a banquet being held in Jesus' honor. At this banquet, Jesus was surrounded by large crowds comprised of tax

collectors, sinners, Pharisees, John's disciples and others who all needed to know that Jesus could not be boxed in by their own expectations, selfish desires or traditions. They were all present for the same speech, but they would all emerge with different messages. They heard in the language that they needed to hear concerning change. For some, it was to be a complete departure from the old. For others, change was to be opening themselves to new things to move in a new direction, while not needing to completely abandon everything from their past. For others still, they were to see that following Jesus is a constant path of renewal, thereby Christianity is not a destination but rather a journey.

The Markan text served as the foundation for both Matthew and Luke, as Mark was the earliest of all the writers and was clearly a reference source for both writers. In Mark's text concerning the new wine (Mark 2:21-22), we see a continuation of Mark's aggressive and non-sugar-coating style, in which his clear interpretation of Jesus' statements concerning new wine and old wineskins was that the two cannot coexist.

In Mark's account, mixing the old with the new just led to greater division and thus, "new garments cannot be used to patch the old" and "new wine must be poured into new wineskins" (Mark 2:21-22). Mark left no room for compromise or negotiation in the change process. In his account, we learn that the old cannot handle the new, and therefore we should accept what is new while releasing and doing away with the old. No doubt, some of Mark's absolutism can be attributed to the fact that he was not an eyewitness, but most likely was a disciple and recorder of Peter, and his writing reflected the temper and stubbornness of Peter. However, an equally significant influence on Mark's understanding of Jesus' parable of new wine was the time and audience to whom Mark was writing. Mark was writing during the fall of the second temple. He was writing

during very apocalyptic times and to a populace that needed to understand the urgency of turning away from the old way, as it had led them to their current place of destruction. Mark wrote with urgency, fire and challenge for people to accept the new wine, or else. Mark's gospel was targeting an audience that was deeply rooted in tradition and completely rejected anything that challenged tradition. He wrote just a few years following the death and resurrection of Christ, but sought to remind his audience that they had brought destruction upon themselves in their unwillingness to let go of their traditions (old wineskins) and their rejection of Jesus (new wine). Mark's challenge toward his audience was appropriate and relevant to them that new wine (Jesus) has come and it could not be bottled up in the old wineskins of tradition. Mark was calling for change and he did so by acknowledging the inability of the old church to accept and embrace Jesus. Therefore, change can only be accomplished by coming out of the old way and receiving the new Savior.

This must have been confusing, especially for Jews who were entrenched in tradition and religion. Was Mark calling for a new religion? Was Mark saying that Jesus was now a new God? What about the prophets, the scriptures, the laws, the practices that made them a nation? Must they reject all of that in order to follow Jesus? These were important questions that undoubtedly would have terrorized the Markan reader of this text. Many of these questions were left unanswered by Mark throughout his gospel, and the challenge of these questions could have been very influential in Matthew writing his account to explain things that troubled Jews who may have made the transition to new wine/Jesus, but needed some questioned answered to do so fully.

In the Matthean account, Mark's assertions presented a few challenges. For example, if Jesus was new wine and needed new wineskins, did that mean that Jesus was disconnected from the old church? Matthew, an eyewitness and one that understood Jewish culture and practices, was much more diplomatic in his approach than Mark. Matthew was seeking to win Jews over and knew that the best way to accomplish this goal was to help the Jews understand that Jesus' coming and teaching was the fulfillment of the law, not the rejection of it. Therefore, in Matthew's account of Jesus' parable of the new wine, we see the insertion of the words toward the end "both will be preserved" (Matthew 9:17). This suggests that Matthew was repeating the same point as Mark, because he did state that "new wine must be poured into new wineskins". However, Matthew was addressing the concerns of the Jews with the Markan text with these words. Consistent with his desire to show continuity between the God of Creation, the Prophets and Jesus, Matthew showed how Jesus "preserves" everything and everyone. Matthew made it clear that Jesus had not come to throw away the old church, nor did His coming reflect that he was a new God, or that there was now a disconnection between the Prophets and the new church. Instead, Matthew presented Jesus as one that preserves, saves, covers, and fulfills all that were before Him, and all that would come after Him. In other words, everything is saved in Jesus. The old law was fulfilled, making it new in Jesus, and the grace and salvation brought by Jesus was new as well, and Jesus would bring them all together.

> Matthew is always connecting the Old and New Testaments, showing that Jesus comes to fulfill the law, so he demonstrates in his gospel the preservation of both. He does not assert that Jesus has come to get rid of the Old, or completely do

> something Brand New. Jesus' work is a continuation of what was started long ago, and All will be saved through it...[61]

The issues concerning continuity and discontinuity were big concerns for Jews, who sought to embrace new wine and new wineskins. Gonzalez raises this issue consistently in his work, addressing its importance to the early church fathers and prospective converts. He states:

> On the one hand, absolute discontinuity between Jesus and what goes on before him or apart from him would lead us far astray. What Jesus does must not be new in the sense that before his advent God was not active, or that whatever God is before the time of Jesus was irrelevant. But on the other hand, uninterrupted continuity between Jesus and the rest of history and of creation makes it difficult to see what is special about Jesus, turning him into little more than one more chapter in human history.[62]

Matthew sought to reveal Jesus as the long-promised Messiah, and he seized nearly every moment to connect Jesus to Old Testament prophesies. If Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesies, then receiving the new wine and new wineskins of Jesus was much easier to embrace since this newness was connected to the history of the nation's calling by God. In this respect, it was new, but it preserved the old at the same time.

Therefore, according to Matthew, change and newness are available only through Jesus Christ, and coming to Jesus makes us new and opens us for new work. What is this new work? The new work is that Jesus has come to save not just the Jews, but he has

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[61] Miller, *Interpreter's Bible*, 590.

[62] Gonzalez, *Luke*, 29-32.

come to save the entire world, and the Jews' rejection of Jesus has led the disciples to spreading the new wine (Jesus) to new wineskins (non-Jews), that all might be saved.

In the Lukan account, we are given our most detailed description and explanation of the parable of new wine. Luke's audience was much different than Mark and Matthew. Luke was a gentile, and he was not an eyewitness. Most likely, he was a student of Paul, and he was writing with the purpose of showing Jesus as one who understood and had come to save the lost, the sinners, the outcasts and the downtrodden. Jesus, according to Luke, was a superhero, seeing the plights of those that society had rejected, and Jesus had come to rescue them. Luke was not a historian, but rather a physician. His priority was not so much on chronology as it was in Christology, assuring everyone that they were included in Jesus' coming. As a physician, Luke was accustomed to engaging the sick, those who are not well and those that others would not touch. This may give us insight into why Luke presented Jesus also as one who engaged sinners, the unhealthy and the rejected.

In the Lukan account of the parable of new wine and new wineskins, Luke seemed to capture the messages intended by both Mark and Matthew, while at the same time introducing his own theology. In his explanation of the new patch and new wine, we find:

> Both have to do with the incompatibility between the old and the new, but also with the negative consequences of trying to combine the two. In both cases, the new has a power that will destroy the old: the new patch will shrink and make a bigger rip in the old cloth, and the new wine will ferment and break the old wineskin. Without saying it so explicitly, Jesus implies that the Pharisees have not recognized the radical newness of what is taking place before their eyes. They want to turn Jesus into one more of the many wise teachers of Israel – to patch him into the old cloth. But the power of the new will not allow such compromises. This does not mean that Jesus is claiming there is no connection between him and

> God's work through the ages before him. Jesus is not just one more episode in the history of God's dealings with Israel. Jesus is the bridegroom for whom the ages have waited. Therefore, simply to add Jesus to the old social or religious practices and expectations would have been disastrous consequences such as when one adds a new cloth to a torn garment or pours new wine into an old wineskin.[63]

The new wine in old wineskins aphorism has been used by many theologians, preachers, teachers and writers to inspire institutional change. However, the study of this controversial and often misunderstood text leads us to a fundamentally deeper prophecy from Jesus. While the statement does project rebuke upon the Pharisees who are seeking to challenge Jesus, the power of this parable, as it is told by Luke, is in its revelation that Jesus is: (1) the "Son of God, not another prophet", (2) His Coming and His purpose cannot be simply lumped in with the acts of those who have come before, (3) Jesus is the one for whom Israel has long been awaiting, and (4) There must be a continual newness in our walk with Christ, because that which gets old cannot receive the new.

It is this fourth point of continual newness that seems to best address the church's perpetual issue of addressing generational gaps. It is evident in Luke's addition of the seemingly sarcastic remark by Jesus in verse 39, in which he states, "And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, the old is better." This verse tells us that it is easy to get comfortable with what we know, and once we have grown comfortable, it will be difficult to be open to something new. This is certainly the case in most churches, in which Christians often settle with what is comfortable and, therefore, are unavailable to anything new the Spirit of God may bring to their parish. Russell Rathbun, in his book *NuChristians: Finding Faith in a New Generation*, says:

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[63] Ibid., 86.

> It is a simple reality that most people feel more comfortable with people like themselves. This realization has even been put into use as a strategy in starting and growing churches. Called the "homogenous unit principle", it was introduced by Donald A. McGavran as a core principle in the church growth movement, a movement associated with Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA…The idea is that when someone walks into a church and sees a bunch of people just like himself or herself – same age, same race, even dressed the same – he or she immediately feels more comfortable and is more likely to stick around. And you know what? The idea really works…The Kingdom of God does not use the "homogenous unit principle". The Kingdom of God is made up of every kind of person there is. Breaking down barriers and expanding the circle of God's kingdom is part of the mission of the Christian Church.[64]

The church, therefore, is called to be in a constant state of renewal. It never becomes old if it continues its pursuit of the work of Christ. Luke helps us tremendously in our effort to understand how to address the changes needed by our church. Too often we are falling in love with religious practices, instead of falling in love with God. Falling in love with God takes our eyes and hearts away from material possessions, secular titles and positions, and traditions.

> The ideals of prophets and saints can take root only when they are attenuated, moderated and compromised with other contradictory ideals and with the demands of the situation and the needs of the "old Adam"...This is why the ideologist, be he prophet or revolutionary, is affronted by the ordinary man's attachment to his mates, to his pub, to his family, to his petty vanities, to his job, to his vulgar gratifications, to his concern for the improvement of his conditions of life.[65]

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[64] Russell Rathbun, *NuChristians: Finding Faith in a New Generation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publishers, 2009), 2.

[65] Stephen Warner, *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small Town Church* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 214.

Instead, we are completely enveloped in our desire to please the Lord and open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. But it is our openness to God that will lead to the regular adding to the body of Christ of persons of various backgrounds and experiences, ages and races, which ultimately is what will make us new.

Historical Foundation

Many Christians, and much of the world, have been given a misleading picture of the ministry and teachings of Jesus, as well as the composition of the early progenitors of the Christian church. Many of the historical depictions in literature, pictures and statues often project the disciples, prophets and other leaders of the faith to be middle-aged men. In a recent focus group with youth and young adult members of a local church in Corona, CA, the question was asked, "How old do you think the disciples were?"[66] The immediate and collaborative response was "between forty to fifty years old".[67] When the facilitator stated that there is a high possibility that Jesus and his followers may have been teenagers to young adults by today's definition, the group broke into laughter and said, "No way, we've never heard that before."[68] The question was then asked, "Would it make a difference if the disciples and the shapers of our faith were younger?"[69] The

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[66] Charles Lee-Johnson, interview by author, Corona, CA, September 27, 2012.

[67] Kristen Blincoe, interview by author, Corona, CA, September 27, 2012.

[68] Focus Group, moderated by author, Corona, CA, September 27, 2012.

[69] Lee-Johnson, interview, September 27, 2012.

participants responded saying, "Yes, it would mean Christianity is not just for you when you're older, but there is a place for us right now."[70]

Likewise, in the study of movements, and particularly revolutionary movements, they are generally youth inspired and led. There is great evidence to suggest that young people were central to Jesus' ministry and the progression of Christianity across the globe. This truth must not be ignored by the church today, as a further loss of its young constituents could prove to be a fatal blow to the faith and its progression in the twenty-first century.

The depiction of Jesus, the disciples and the early followers of Jesus as older persons no doubt has been done intentionally, as a movement or religion that was advanced by a bunch of teenagers and young adults would probably not be taken as seriously. While casting this elderly picture of Christianity has led the Christian religion to being the most widespread religion on the planet, it can possibly be a contributing factor to the recent declines, particularly of young people, that the church across the world are experiencing. The Christian church has done itself a grave disservice in its elderly depiction of the church, the Christian faith and its advancement; as young people (ages fifteen to thirty) often find churches and church history to be the domains of old people. This misleading portrayal pushes droves of young people to disconnect from the church and the Christian faith. When the church loses its young people, it loses its fire, its creativity, its rebel spirit and its relevance for future generations. Much of this can be attributed to the inability for young people to see themselves within Biblical text, Christian history and the church.

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[70] Blincoe, interview, September 27, 2012.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life estimates that there are currently 2.2 billion Christians in the world, making Christianity the world's largest religion.[71] However, in the Western Hemisphere, especially America, churches and Christianity are experiencing dangerous declines in the numbers of individuals that profess to be Christians, the number that attend weekly church services and the number of Americans that boldly proclaim to have "no religion".[72] The church has been one of the most important American institutions in the creation and advancement of democracy, freedom, equality and charity. The ramifications of this decline can be catastrophic, not just for believers, but for the entire world. These numbers are especially alarming amongst teenagers and young adults. David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, an evangelical research firm, states in his book *You Lost Me: Why Young People are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, that "18 to 29 year olds have fallen down a black hole of church attendance. There is a 43% drop in church attendance between the teen and early adult years."[73] In a separate study, the Barna Group found that, "Nearly 60% of all Christians between the ages of 15-29 are no longer actively involved in any church."[74] Kinnaman's book explores the vast reasons why young people are leaving the church,

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[71] Michael Snyder, "How Will the Shocking Decline of Christianity in America Affect the Future of this Nation," *The American Dream Blog*, January 18, 2012, accessed October 2, 2012, http://endoftheamericandream.com/archives/how-will-the-shocking-decline-of-christianity-in-america-affect-the-future-of-this-nation.

[72] Laura Stepp, "Why Young Evangelicals are Leaving Church," *CNN.com*, December 16, 2011, accessed October 2, 2012, http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/16/opinion/stepp-millennials-church/index.html.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

and like most research concerning this issue, he found identity is a serious problem.[75] Many young people do not see their importance within the local church, and the local church often fails to use young people, due to its misunderstanding of the important role young people have served in the advancement of the Christian faith.

While pictures would often have us believe that Christianity was built on the backs of older men, nothing could be further from the truth. A closer examination of the history of Christianity suggests that the disciples and many of the early followers of "the way" were young people, and their risk-taking behavior, communal living, ability to travel, energetic presentation of the gospel and persistence in the face of opposition were all attributes of their youthfulness that were necessary for the advancement of the gospel. Rowena Ferguson, in her book *Youth and the Christian Community,* has a chapter entitled "A Look at Youth Behavior".[76] In this chapter, while Ferguson states that young people exhibit characteristics that are similar to any other person in later stages of development, she raises four traits that are often indicative of youthful behavior, including the desire for security, the desire for emotional security, the desire for spiritual security and the desire for adventure.[77]

Ferguson suggests that the desire for security is a basic desire within young people for the provision of shelter, food and the basic necessities of life. Ferguson suggests that these provisions do not need to be elaborate, but are warranted by young

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[75] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 20.

[76] Rowena Ferguson, *Youth and the Christian Community* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1954), chap. 1-4.

[77] Ibid.

people in a very general sense. Young people would be more open to the idea of communal living, versus adults who have already established families and children. In the early formation of the church, the apostles and other followers are said to live communally, insuring that each other's basic needs are being met. As one writer states:

> After Pentecost, the Church grew rapidly. In those early days, the believers banded together, sharing everything they had with one another. This built a tremendous unity between them that would be necessary for the early Church to spread and survive persecution.[78]

This is further detailed in Acts 2:44-47, where it reads:

> And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Having one's basic needs met, while abandoning the luxuries and materialism of the secular world, has been an enduring idea within the spectrum of Christian thought. From the communal living of the early Christians to monasticism to the holiness movements, separation from the secular has always been seen in Christianity. In the early history of the church, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, wrote in his biography of Anthony of Egypt, who "went into the desert at the age of fifteen and remained there, living a life of extreme austerity, for the next ninety years. As time passed, Anthony became famous and numbers of young men decided to join him in the desert and learn

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[78] "Early Christian Church History," *Essortment.com*, accessed November 11, 2012, http://www.essortment.com/early-christian-church-history-21117.html.

from him and attempt to follow his way of life."[79] As will be highlighted later, we see this move towards communal living as a consistent trait of all youth movements, from the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s to the "occupy" movements of 2011 and 2012. Part of the appeal of these movements is their ability to provide their shared responsibility in the provision of basic physical needs, and this type of cooperative living has historically been associated with youthfulness and not later stages of adulthood. This may suggest that the early followers of Jesus, who sacrificed personal possessions and societal status in exchange for preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, were not a group of older men, but rather a band of teenagers and young adults who were satisfied as long as their basic needs were met.

Ferguson in her second point argues that young people have a strong desire for emotional security, which she defines as a sense of belonging or being included. A survey of early Christian life reveals that the Christian movement heavily emphasized belonging and placed great importance on reaching persons who were outcasts or marginalized, even across cultural lines. Young people, who are characteristically searching for identity within groups, would have been the likely constituents of the groups of early Christians that gathered in various nations as part of the "Jesus movement". The early followers of Christ developed a radically distinct and different social group from Jewish and Roman cultural groups and would have provided a great outlet for young people to express their opposition to both factions of life. History reveals that both cultures reserved most powers, positions and resources to those who were at least more than twenty years of age

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[79] "Monastic Tendencies Before Monasticism," *ReligionFacts.com*, August 11, 2004, accessed November 11, 2012, http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/monasticism.

and/or were descendents of prominent families, so the Christian movement would have been very attractive for those who were not of age or part of the aristocracy. Unlike most other prominent social groups, the early Christian movement had very few requirements. As Kee, Frost, Albu, Lindberg and Robert explain:

> Their custom was to gather early in the morning to sing a hymn to Christ as a god. Their sacred meal involved only ordinary food. Their common oath required them to avoid adultery, fraud, deceit and theft. Their leaders included women known as deaconesses. They were guilty of no crime against the state, except their refusal to honor the traditional gods and the deified emperor. This, however, was sufficiently serious to lead to the execution of those members who refused to renounce their allegiance to Jesus Christ. The designation of the group as "Christians" shows that central to their existence and identity was the affirmation…[they] were God's people.[80]

Indeed, it would be hard to imagine the Christian movement not being attractive to young people in mass numbers, particularly as they are in a stage of seeking belonging.

Thirdly, Ferguson states that young people have the desire for spiritual security. Ferguson asserts that the quest for God begins early in life, but heightens especially when "the young person breaks ties with home". She states that, "the aloneness challenges all of his Spiritual resources". The quest for a deeper understanding of life, an understanding of purpose and an explanation of the world leads young people to seek spiritual understanding. Throughout human history, this fact has proven to be true. From the times of antiquity of the Egyptian Mystery Schools, the traditional ceremonies of the "poro" (Swahili word for Rites of Passage), to the awakenings and revivals of America, young people have always been drawn to these religious rites in their quest for spiritual security.

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[80] Howard Clark Kee, Jerry W. Frost, Emily Albu, Carter Lindberg and Dana L. Robert, *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ : Prentice Hall, 1998), 23.

The words of one of early Christianity's most well-respected members, Justin Martyr, capture this sentiment well when he states:

> We who formerly…valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possession, now bring what we have into a common stock and communicate to everyone, indeed, we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, love familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies.[81]

Martyr speaks of a maturity he and his comrades have experienced since coming to Christ. His words denote that they have experienced a spiritual awakening and have now found purpose and unity under Jesus Christ. Certainly, young people did not miss this opportunity with Christianity, which provided a new way of understanding self, others and life.

Lastly, Ferguson says that youthfulness is marked by the desire for adventure. For most of its years, Christianity has faced serious opposition and at many times has been associated with deadly consequences for its leaders and followers. While it is not impossible that older persons would have engaged in such risks following the teachings of a man that most of them never met, it is much more plausible that the early followers and witnessing travelers of Christianity were young people. Young people are natural thrill seekers, adventurers and the world's most notable risk takers. Living on the run, standing in opposition to governments, engaging in generational conflict, and risking severe punishment (incarceration, flogging and even death) all suggest the adventure-

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[81] Rowan Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives: Theology and Common Life in the Early Church* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 13.

seeking behavior of young people, not older adults. One writer states of this early generation of Christians:

> Their refusal to participate in honors to Roman gods and the deified emperors, which would have been understood by the Romans as adding to the risk of national calamities sent by the gods; and the conviction of the members that they were the People of God, distinct from the rest of the human race. Even the principle of inclusive membership, which was characteristic of both Jesus and his followers, would not offset this sense of a favored, elect community.[82]

While Ferguson does not suggest that the early leaders and followers of the church were young people, her criteria of young behavior certainly suggests that young people would have been the likely leaders and mass constituents in the spread of Christianity throughout the world. While some may suggest that age does not matter, like most cultural groups, young people and elder members of churches need to understand the importance of young people in the history of Christian progression, thereby awakening both groups to the necessity of not just including young people, but actively empowering them to lead the Christian faith forward.

The present-day church is missing the youthful fire that embodied the early church. Failing to harness the incredible passion and fervor that is innate to the young has led the modern church to experience rapid decline. The church was not only built on this youthfulness, but has been sustained by its ability to engage young people, even if it was through the force and coercion of their respective families. Today, as the state of our families has experienced serious peril, the family's ability to influence religion has also been jeopardized. Young people are given choices concerning church attendance or even

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[82] Kee et al., *Christianity*, 23.

their faith for that matter, and the old presentation of the church, the hypocrisy they witness within their respective homes and amongst church leaders, and their inability to find a meaningful place for them within the church have all led them to invest their creativity and energy elsewhere. Interestingly, we see many of these attributes in hip hop music, which has led to its multicultural appeal and incredible global growth and embracement. Hip hop music owes its growth to its capitalization of the natural skills and abilities of young people, and the church has lost this generation because it has positioned and marketed itself as a less-radical, conservative and older body.

It appears that Jesus was well aware that change generally starts with young people, because at the tender age of twelve, the book of Luke recorded Jesus leaving his family and discoursing with religious leaders in the temple. When Jesus was confronted by his parents, he responded in Luke 2:49 with the rhetorical question, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's House?" Exegesis of this text has revealed many things, of which one is that a precedent was being set for the place of young people being engaged in God's business. Later in Jesus' ministry, Matthew and Luke tell the story of "little children being brought to Jesus.

> Then children were brought to him that he may lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:13-14)

Clearly, the central leader of the Christian movement, Jesus, saw young people as intergral members of God's kingdom.

Further illustration of young people's involvement in the formation and advancement of Christianity is that many of the disciples chosen by Jesus were most

likely young men. While the ages of the disciples are unknown, one theorist, Ray Vander Laan, proposes that, "the twelve disciples were all under the age of 20, with the exception of Peter."[83] Vander Laan raises five arguments to support his theory. The first regards the temple tax, where in the book of Matthew, Jesus orders Peter to pay the temple tax for both he and Jesus. The preceding verses of scripture suggest that all of the disciples were present, but tax was only needed for Peter and Jesus. Vander Laan argues that the others may not have been required to pay because they were underage. According to Exodus 30:13-14, temple tax was required only for those who were ages twenty years and over.

The second argument was Jesus calling his disciples "little ones". Vander Laan points out that Jesus calls his disciples "little children" in Matthew 11:25, Luke 10:21 and John 13:33. Certainly if the disciples were grown men, Jesus calling them "little children" or "little ones" would have been offensive. The disciples never complained about being called "little children" and the writers of the gospels never challenged the fact of them being little children. This all suggests that the disciples were predominately under the age of twenty.

Vander Laan's third argument is the disciples were unmarried. He points out that a Jewish man generally received a wife by the age of eighteen; however, the only disciple we are told that has a wife is Peter in Matthew 8:14-15

The fourth argument has to do with the rabbinic educational system. Vander Laan directs us to understand the Jewish education traditions of Jesus' time, and points out that, "Scripture study begins at age 5; Mishnah study at 10; Torah obligations at 13;

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[83] Kay Bonikowsky, "Jesus' Disciples: A Teenage Posse?," *The Happy Surprise Blog*, August 20, 2008, accessed November 11, 2012, http://kbonikowsky.wordpress.com/2008/08/20/jesus-disciples-a-teenage-posse.

continued rabbinical study at 15 if chosen to be tutored by a formal teacher or apprenticed to a trade; marriage at 18; formal teaching at 30." Vander Laan goes on to state, "a man over 30 leaving his trade to follow a rabbi would be counter-cultural; not impossible, but more likely they were younger than older."

And finally, the fifth argument regards the zeal and folly of youth. Vander Laan argues that the actions of the disciples throughout the gospels are more consistent with the behavior of teenagers and young adults than grown men. He cites the disciples being fear-stricken when their boat was in a storm and "waking Jesus up for help". Vander Laan also addresses the constant forgetfulness and distractions suffered by the disciples as being parallel to the behavior of adolescents versus older men. He does also present the opposing side to his theory, discussing Matthew being a tax collector and Jesus giving his mother to John, but overall, Vander Laan's theory of the age of the disciples is very plausible. When we demystify the stories of the gospels, it makes more sense if the disciples were adolescents or young adults. It explains the arguing over positions in heaven, the irresponsibility of falling asleep in the garden of Gethsemane and even the betrayal of Judas.

In many respects, the ministry of Jesus and the twelve disciples could be described as the young versus the old. The Pharisees and Sadducees, by most estimation, would have been older men than Jesus and his followers. The Pharisees were middle-class business men and the Sadducees were political aristocrats, which lead us to believe they were older gentleman, at least older than Jesus and the twelve disciples. While we do not have definitive records of the ages of many of these men, their positions in society and their posturing often assist us with an idea concerning age. If not for biological age,

we certainly can agree that Pharisees and Sadducees represented the old or traditional practices and beliefs of Jewish religious and political life, and Jesus and the twelve disciples presented a younger and more liberal/contemporary approach to God and life that was offensive to the Pharisees and Sadducees. The old guard (Pharisees and Sadducees) often viewed Jesus as a threat, as his teachings and even his practices were a break from the old or traditional way of doing things. Additionally, Jesus did not regard position, politics or wealth, but in fact challenged those with position and wealth in their service to God. These are challenges that we see within the church today. On one hand, we have the traditionalist, who wants to preserve the church as they know it, and then there is the young generation, which challenges the old views, processes, practices and even beliefs of the church. Of course, this inference is not to suggest that one side is right or the other is wrong, but rather to identify this generational conflict that can be seen in biblical history and still existent even today. This conflict has often led to the rejection of the ideas and beliefs of this young generation, and they have suffered a sort of crucifixion at the hands of the old guard.

Theories that suggest a younger group of disciples may be difficult to digest for many, because the images of old men with long beards, flowing cloaks and walking staffs have been etched into our minds. However, when we examine scripture within the cultural context of Jesus' time, it's highly probable that Jesus selected twelve young people to change the world. This is very significant, because if the disciples were young adults, those they reached in the early formation of the church were likely to be young as well. It would illuminate the central thesis of this paper, which suggests that young people have always been central figures in the Christian movement and the present-day

church cannot afford to lose this important generation in its parishes, because it will also be the loss of the charisma, creativity and driving force within young people that has pushed Christianity across the globe.

It is one thing to examine the early church and to identify that young people were most likely key figures in the spreading of Christianity. However, the question must be asked, Is this kind of youth-inspired reformation and revival of Christianity possible in America? Christianity and young people in America have shared a turbulent relationship. In the early days of faith in America, young people were largely ignored in local churches, as it was believed that the parents' relationship with God was sufficient to cover the entire household.[84] During the Great Awakening of 1740-1742, led by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, the idea of adult conversion was heavily stressed.

> Edwards and Whitfield taught according to Luther Weigle: Children were held to be lost in sin, depraved by nature, and in need of a wholly new heart. They were children of wrath until the Holy Spirit should transmute them into children of God. It mattered nothing what their parentage, or what the quality of the home in which they were brought up…Older folk can do nothing for them, then, save to seek to deepen in them a sense of their need, and to pray on their behalf for the gift of conversion.[85]

This awakening gave birth to the call for young people in America to accept personal responsibility for their salvation, and called for American churches to include young people in the populace they sought to convert. By the 1840s, Michael Warren states that, "…a number of social forces combined with the theory of Christian nurture arose that raised the idea that Christianity restricted the independence of young people".

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[84] Michael Warren, *Youth, Gospel and Liberation* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987), 2.

[85] Ibid.

In the search for independence, there was a mass departure of young people from the church, which coincided with a moral decline amongst young people. Warren states that it was the, "Young People's Movement of the 1880s and 1890s, programs to build moral character" that arose and re-engaged young people in Christianity. Similarly, Herbert Mayer, in his book *The Church's Program for Young People: A Textbook of Adolescent Religious Education in the Local Church*, discusses the great rift between the church and young people of the early 1900s:

> Very early in the history of the church, theologians developed the doctrine of infant damnation and original sin. They seem to have lost sight of Jesus' own teaching. Even today there is considerable sentiment that it is a waste of time and energy to bother with children or young people. The ancient theological ideas that young people were hopelessly lost were one of the reasons why little was done. The popular notion during the last generation has been expressed in a well known saying, "boys will be boys". This always seems to imply that what they do now is of little consequence, since it has nothing to do with the later life when they are worth something.[86]

Mayer suggests, "The church must throw aside its warped view of adult importance and see all its work in the true perspective of the Master. His central teaching of the infinite value of the human soul, not the adult soul alone, must be translated into the working program of the church."[87] The beginning of this positive engagement of young people within American Christianity was seen in the founding of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1845. In 1881, Dr. Francis E. Clark and the Society of Christian Endeavor developed programs within churches to engage young people. Mayer

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[86] Herbert C. Mayer, *The Church's Program for Young People: A Textbook of Adolescent Religious Education in the Local Church* (New York, NY/London, UK: The Century Co., 1925), 8.

[87] Ibid, 88.

states that "these programs swept through churches" and led young people to work side-by-side with pastors to devise youth programs. In 1892, the work of Dr. William Byron Forbush and his Knights of King Arthur helped to popularize the idea of churches engaging young people. In 1902, Ernest Thompson Seton founded the Woodcraft Indians, a group that served as the model for the Boys and Girls Clubs, which were brought to America in 1910. Mayer says, "In 1910, the International Sunday School Association, Frank L Brown of Brooklyn and E.H. Nichols of Chicago were chief leaders fighting for recognition of what was called the 'teen age'. By 1915, denominations began establishing departments to focus on adolescents and young people."[88] By 1918, the call for youth programs within churches had expanded to such a degree that, "Boston University set up a department of Religious Education and among its first courses were some dealing with adolescents."[89] It appeared that the church had everything going well in the 1920s through the 1950s, but the late 1950s and 1960s once again witnessed a departure of young people from the church. This was followed by what has been called, "The Jesus Revolution". Billy Graham, in his book *The Jesus Generation*, states, "Possibly the most outstanding revolution now taking place in America is what *Time* magazine calls the 'Jesus Revolution.' And it is not confined to America. There are signs that it is beginning

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[88] Ibid., 89.

[89] Ibid., 90.

in many other countries as well."[90] Michael McFadden, in his book *The Jesus Revolution*, says this movement or revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was marked by,

> Large numbers of young people wearing sandals and beads were worshipping beside those whom the young of a generation ago (or even a few years ago) would have put down as "bible belters". This is creating a new and rather peculiar alliance between the traditionally conservative fundamentalist Christians and the rebellious young longhairs. An elderly woman in Anaheim, CA, said, "I resented it at first the way these hippies were coming to my church, but now I think they are the most important part of the ministry. They are living true Christian lives."[91]

Interestingly, this youth movement within Christianity closely mirrors the aforementioned processes of Jesus and the disciples. It was a revisitation of the rebels coming to church and the church having no place for them. Just as Jesus and his young band of rebels refused to be deterred, the same is true of the young people of the Jesus Revolution. McFadden states, "Indeed much of the activity is outside the established church, and some of it is specifically anti-church." Jesus' movement was also anti-church, and much of his teaching and miracles happened outside the church. Like Jesus and the disciples, it could not be denied that something special was happening. Even those that didn't like these hippies for Jesus had to admit:

> It is an authentic revival, an outburst of people in many ways in many places. But it is most evident among those young people who have combined their Christianity with an alternative lifestyle, have rejected many of the values of conventional society, and have found in the Bible a new model – the lives of the first-century Christians. They have been called and call themselves by a number of names, but loosely defined, they are the "Jesus People". Many of the Jesus

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[90] Billy Graham, *The Jesus Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 16-21.

[91] Michael McFadden, *The Jesus Revolution* (New York, NY: Harrow Books/Harper and Row, 1972), 120.

> People have chosen to live together. As their ranks have grown, some of these groups have become highly organized and have established branches. The Children of God, for instance, formed in 1967, but now have more than 30 colonies…There are other organizations including The Way, with chapters in Wichita, Kansas; Rye, New York; and Mill Valley, CA; The Process with groups in Massachusetts, New Orleans, Chicago and Toronto; The Christian World Liberation Front in Berkeley, and the Christian Foundation in Saugus, CA.[92]

This movement mirrors the Jesus movement, which the early church was founded upon, and once again, young people were at the center. Mc Fadden says that these "Jesus People" were in their "teens and twenties", similar to the suspected ages of the disciples, and their communal living, which is often a trait of youth movements, is also reminiscent of early Christianity.

Billy Graham who says, "as a teenager in Florida, his first ministry was on the streets", writes about this generation that often attended revivals and crusades in which he preached. He suggests that there are nine traits of the Jesus Generation,[93] and not surprisingly, this youth movement mirrors the youth movement of Jesus and the disciples. The traits of the Jesus Generation movement highlighted by Graham and the early church movement similarities include: (1) The movement centers in Jesus – Christ is the common denominator, not denominationalism. Just as this youth movement focused on Jesus as the central figure, Church historians tell us that the apostles held Jesus as the Messiah, the central focus of their teaching, which partially led them to being identified

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[92] Ibid., 13.

[93] Graham, *The Jesus Generation*, 16-21.

as Christians very early.[94] (2) The movement is Bible based (the Bible is a how-to live book). The Jesus Generation once again mirrors the early church, which focused heavily on the reading of scripture.[95] (3) The movement demands an experience with Jesus Christ. The Jesus Generation believed that you must be born again, and that this experience with God would be evident to all. Once again, we see common themes amongst the early shapers of our faith, in which evidence was seen as necessary to show one's conversion.[96] (4) They are putting a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The early church also emphasized the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as now being available to all, not just Jews.[97] (5) The movement finds a cure for drugs and other vicious habits which increasingly captivate and enslave the youth of the world. The Jesus Generation wanted to pull people away from lives of depravity, and we see the same goals reflected in the early church framers who also sought to pull people away from corruption and sin. (6) The movement emphasizes Christian discipleship. This was clearly a characteristic of the early church, evidenced in the book of Acts and the exponential growth of the Christian faith. (7) They emphasize social responsibility. The Jesus Generation cut across social and racial lines despite the racist and segregationist practices of the country. Likewise, the early church leaders cut across social and cultural lines, and people of all

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[94] Kee et al., *Christianity*, 24-36.

[95] Ibid., 30.

[96] Diana B. Bass, *A People's History of Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 31-57.

[97] Kee et al., *Christianity*, 40.

backgrounds worshipped with one another.[98] (8) The Jesus Generation displays an incredible zeal for evangelism. Once again, the early church fathers expressed this same fire, even the willingness to die for what they believed. Lastly, (9) the Jesus Generation has brought a re-emphasis to the second coming of Jesus Christ. The early church was very "apocalyptic in its teaching",[99] so much that some historians have identified the early movement of the church as the apocalyptic movement.

The incredible similarities between the Jesus Generation and the early church leaders and followers once again suggest that young people, teenagers and young adults, were not only part of the early movement of the church, but were likely the primal leaders and drivers of Christianity's spread across the world. This understanding of the historical relevance of young people in Christian history informs us that God has a unique place for young people in the building of His kingdom. Young people may be the most critical group for church growth and for the continuance of Christianity in the twenty-first century.

Summary

Millennials are missing from churches across America, and while it's easiest to point the finger at young adults for their absenteeism, the ecclesia is not exempt from the role it has played and continues to play in alienating and neglecting young adults. The

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[98] Bass, *A People's History of Christianity*, 59-81.

[99] Kee et al., *Christianity*, 12-13.

foundational work makes it clear that the church needs young adults, and conversely, young adults need the church.

Throughout secular and biblical history, young adults have been forerunners in the activity and work of God, and their engagement in God's work gave purpose, direction and meaning to their individual and collective lives. Additionally, within the doctrine of the Trinity, God's own nature demonstrates and communicates that his church must uphold individuality without forsaking community; uniqueness without segregation; equality without separation; and harmony without division. The ministries of Jeremiah and Jesus covered in this chapter sought to eradicate the sinfully contrived hierarchies, egoism and oppression that were present in the church and perpetuated by religious leaders who were more concerned with position and power than the power and presence of God.

The patristic fathers and Methodist leaders fought hard to promote equality and equity among all God's children. The church of the twenty-first century cannot be effective with carrying out the great commission given by Jesus without young adults. Likewise, young adults will not be effective in living purpose-driven, Christ-centered lives without the church. The social theorists of our era communicate clearly that young adults are teachable and reachable, and provide us with great insight into the learning patterns that church programs must incorporate to be successful in reaching millennials. This generation is ours to lose.

Intergenerational rifts within the church are not new. What would be new is if the church of the twenty-first century fails to take immediate and urgent action to recapture America's largest generation. The consequences of not reaching millennials could spell

death for the church, and godliness and destruction for the families, communities, cities, states and nation our young adults will dwell in tomorrow. The absence of millennials in the church is an alarming issue, but it's also an enormous opportunity for the church and world to be reformed, renewed, restored and revived. A failure to respond to this great challenge, would be a betrayal to our faith, lead to the death of our churches and the deterioration of our families and communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Problem Statement

Despite great technological advances, the fabric of twenty-first century America is stained with great moral decay, familial deterioration and social polarization. The church must be the institution that leads America to renewal, but it cannot fulfill this calling without the millennial generation. While churches throughout America have witnessed a steady decline in faithful parishioners, there is one group that is notably missing across nearly every denomination – young adults. Absenteeism of young adults from America's churches persists across geographic, racial and socio-economic lines. The generations who are coming-of-age in the twenty-first century do not see the church as relevant, necessary or beneficial to their development, as our society provides numerous alternatives for young adults that were previously under the exclusive domain of the church. This is especially true amongst ethnic minorities like African-Americans, in which the church was the dominant social organization for nearly every activity outside of one's house in the past. In the 1970s and 1980s, it would be rare to hear a

young person say they have never been to church. However, today we find that only 17.7% of Americans attend church.

This is not the first time in church history that young adults have fallen away from the church. However, in previous eras the church has been very intentional and aggressive in its efforts to evaluate itself, assess the needs of young adults of that time, and restructure itself to be more relevant to its younger constituents. The church of previous periods understood the importance of young adults to the work of Christ and the importance of the church's partnership with young adults as they seek to establish their professional and personal adult lives. Many sociologists and theorists consider the young adulthood stage of development to be a critical time in the lives of people, as the decisions that are made during this developmental stage can have lasting effects. During young adulthood, some very important transitions occur, including changes in parent-child relationship roles, educational transitions, legal ramifications, fiscal responsibility, social identity, social accessibility and personal/spiritual responsibility, just to name a few. Additionally, this may also be the time when young people consider starting a family, selecting a career, adopting lifestyles and much more. It would be tragic for the church not to insure that God is in the center of these transitions and life decisions. While groups like Focus on the Family suggest that the most important stage for you to be exposed to religion is during the time in your parent's house, other researchers like the Barna Group have found that young adults often go through a phase of rejecting or challenging many of the things their parents taught them, and young adults are open to ideas, beliefs, systems and organizations that cater to them to shape their own ideas and beliefs.

Young adults are vital to the health, wealth and growth of churches, as well as the future of Christianity. The loss of this generation would be tragic for all of society, as we would witness families, organizations, communities, public policies and lifestyles that are absent of Christ. It would mark a failure of the church to follow the Great Commission to reach all people, and it could eventually lead to the extinction of churches in America, as is being witnessed throughout much of Europe. Despite denominational differences, churches must identify models that will effectively and efficiently recruit and retain young adults.

The church will be battling a multi-headed monster as it seeks to reach a generation that has lost faith in the traditional structures of our society. This generation feels like it has been failed by its families (as single-parent households have become the new norm), failed by its educational systems (as many need remediation upon entrance into college), and too often failed by the church (which has been found to be hypocritical, judgmental and unsupportive). To attract young adults, the church must recognize and address its role in failing a generation. The church must find ways to engage young adults of the twenty-first century, or there may not be a church of the twenty-second century.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this ministry project proposes that the writer, working in collaboration with lay members of Corona Community AME Church and affiliated young adults, can create and implement a discipleship training program for young adults that will increase young adult church attendance and participation. This hypothesis is based on the

researcher's personal experiences and information developed during his execution of pastoral duties at Corona Community AME Church. His awareness of the needs of ministry, as well as his experiences as a social worker and educator, prepared him for this task, which will increase young adult church participation and attendance and strengthen the overall ministry of the church.

The plan for the completion of the study involved young adults, the pastor, Christian educators and lay mentors in a five-session series of educational classes designed to encouraged spiritual growth, thereby leading participants to discover the importance of renewing or establishing a regular relationship with the local church. The discipleship training model is designed to engage a diverse group of participants who will contribute to the success of the goal through a process of "learning by doing", which is a methodology tool known as action research. The implementation of action research "signals your intent to intervene in and improve your learning in order to improve practice, and accept responsibility for doing so".[1]

Action research implies that there must be action taken by the researcher and the participants in order to bring about change. Additionally, action research can contribute to a new perspective, an increase in personal growth, and allow contributions from participants to enhance what is already established before the action research begins. Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, in their book *Introduction to Action Research,* reveal three elements that are required for this type of research:

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[1] Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead, *You and Your Action Research Project*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 35.

> Action research refers to the conjunction of three elements: research, action, and participation. Unless all three elements are present, the research cannot be called Action Research. Put another way, action research is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis. But the social change we refer to is not just any kind of change. Action research aims to increase the ability of the involved community or organization members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so.[2]

Intervention

As the pastor of Corona Community AME Church, the researcher, aware of the lack of young adult attendance and participation in the local church, felt spiritually led to take steps to address the problem. As a social worker, community college faculty member and community activist, the researcher has spent more than twenty years educating and engaging young adults. The researcher has previously designed and implemented programs and strategies that promoted self-esteem, self-awareness, self-discipline and self-sufficiency for young adults, which the researcher felt could be replicated in the context. This study was completed in the context of Corona Community AME Church in Corona, California.

The purpose of the project was to explore possible strategies and predict future outcomes that would benefit the congregation and provide researched-based insight for the church by: 1) providing young adults with discipleship training that is relevant, consistent, purposeful and engaging with hopes to increase attendance, involvement and retention; 2) empower and encourage young adults to make biblically sound life decisions

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[2] Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1998), 6.

by offering mentors; and 3) strengthening and insuring the future of the church by increasing the involvement of young adults in ministry.

Research Design

The design included an intergenerational consortium of young adults, lay leaders and the pastor working separately and collectively in brainstorming, discussing, and through recommendations, presenting strategies to meet the goal of the ministry project. The responsive action research method, chosen by the researcher, was qualitative analysis to evaluate the data. This type of analysis was chosen since it allows for variables within the research to be subjective rather than objective. The data were triangulated via surveys, focus groups and pre- and post-tests.

This method allowed the researcher to be critical, while possessing the ability to identify overlapping themes when finding similarities and differences of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and roles within the participating group. Additional data-gathering strategies included personal, informal discussions and interviews, as well as recommendations by the participants of strategies that would achieve the goals of the project. Careful examination and analysis of any additional information was pertinent, as it provided insight in identifying barriers of young adult church attendance and participation, as well as how to address these concerns strategically.

The specific design of the project included five phases implemented by the researcher. First was the planning phase, in which numerous focus groups were held to encourage brainstorming of what a young adult discipleship program might look like for

Corona Community AME Church. Additionally, participants in the focus group identified prospective participant demographics (age, gender, how many, etc.), how to obtain the necessary volunteers for the project, the place of the project and duration. Second was the curriculum development phase, in which planning members developed curriculum materials, topics for sessions, workshop PowerPoint presentations and fill-in handouts for weekly sessions. Additionally, the researcher along with those on the planning committee created the tools to be utilized for project evaluation, which included the pre-test and post-tests materials, surveys and a plan for the overall evaluation process. Third was the recruitment phase, in which the planning committee developed strategies to recruit and retain at least twelve young adults for the discipleship training. Fourth was the implementation phase, in which recruited young adults would attend a weekly, two-hour session over a five-week period, with access to adult mentors following each session. And finally, fifth was the evaluation phase, in which data were collected and analyzed on how the intervention influenced participant attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and practices.

The first weekly session in the implementation phase included an orientation, completion of pre-tests and a discussion on the first topic, "Life Planning". In the second week, the researcher led a class on "Relationship Success". In the third week, the researcher led a class on "Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships". In the fourth week, the researcher led a class on "Financial Success". And in the fifth week, the researcher led a class on "Financial and Life Success, God's Way", then participants completed post-tests and surveys, and select participants scheduled follow-up interviews.

For this project, the researcher implemented a discipleship model called Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering that utilizes the core stratagem's of social media, hip hop

and biblically based life skills to engage young adults in coming to church. The literature revealed that there are several common characteristics of the churches that young adults do attend. Many of these churches have learned from the strategies of hip hop/pop music and social media. They include (1) realness, in which young people appreciate the Bible being preached and taught in an applicable way that relates to their daily challenges and experiences. This generation can handle the truth, and prefers that the gospel is shared in an uncompromised manner that hits home. Also important is that church is (2) interactive, as young adults don't want to simply sit and be preached to; they'd rather have a dialogue. They are curious about things they have seen, heard or previously learned about God and the Bible and churches that seek to attract young adults must be open to these questions and able to lead young adults to answers they can understand. They also value churches that are (3) relationship based, as young adults are looking for someone to guide them – a pastor, youth pastor, teacher, someone who will disciple them. They will stick in the church if there is a relationship. Churches must also be (4) modern/relevant to young adults. Churches should use bands and consider louder, upbeat music. Young adults like hymns, but they also like faster-paced music to match their energy. The use of screens, PowerPoints and social media will keep young adults connected to their church, too. Additionally, churches should provide instruction that is pertinent to the lives of young adults, such as on subjects like dating, education, careers, starting a family, financial management, etc. When the church provides these kinds of lessons, even from a biblical perspective, it will show that the church cares about young adults and is seeking to minister to their needs. And finally, young adults value (5)

exposure to new things, as this generation is a "do it" generation. They want to serve, and exposing them to new opportunities will pique their interests and keep them engaged.

We hypothesized that the implementation of a discipleship program that is relevant/real, includes rituals and is relationship based will lead participating young adults to feel more confident about their Christian beliefs, increase church attendance, and encourage young adults to be more involved in the church.

Overview of the Project

The research concerning the trend of young adults dropping out from churches has revealed that one of the reasons young people either stop attending church or fail to attend church is because they don't see church as necessary or relevant to their present stage in life. Our review of the literature, however, led us to believe that young adulthood is such a critical and impressionable stage of life that the church cannot afford to not engage young adults. The church is called "to make disciples" (Matthew 28), and Jesus set the ultimate example as he selected twelve young adults to disciple, which ultimately changed the world. Jesus spent time developing an authentic relationship with his disciples and teaching them God's Word in a relevant way (via parables and experiences). Disciples were able to ask questions and receive sound answers to the questions they had concerning their faith. Many of the important tenets that research reveals about adult learning can be found in how Jesus discipled the twelve.

The goal of this project was to implement a discipleship program that enriches young adults' understanding of the Christian faith, enhances their ability to align their

lifestyle with their Christian beliefs, and encourages young adult church attendance and involvement.

Participants in the project included both male and female young adults (ages eighteen to thirty-five). We sought to have twelve participants, nine of whom regularly attended church and three who did not regularly attend church. Classes were facilitated by the D.Min. candidate and context associates. Each session was ninety minutes in length and utilized hip hop music, social media and visuals to keep young adults engaged.

The review of literature revealed the importance of relevancy and realness to engage young adults. Therefore, participants were invited to be a part of a discipleship experience in which they would receive important information pertaining to life skills, character development and spiritual formation. The sessions within the experience focused on issues and information pertinent to young adulthood and utilized music, movies, the Internet and other mediums to make the process as real as possible. The discipleship experience was divided into five workshop sessions designed to be interactive forums to facilitate young adults' understanding of the Bible's teachings on how we are to live. Participants attended one workshop per week for five weeks. Each workshop provided young adults with Christian-based information on the following areas: character development, self-sufficiency, education, career selection, money management, relationship management, civic involvement and spiritual formation. These topic areas were selected according to the recurring themes found in the research concerning issues important to young adults.

The literature review revealed the importance of ritualism when engaging youth and young adults.[3] The church must communicate that we value and commend the participants' spiritual growth and maturity. Therefore, at the conclusion of the five sessions, our initial plan was to recognize participants via a graduation/recognition ceremony in which we would've encouraged participants to invite their parents, family members and others to witness their completion of the discipleship experience. Unfortunately, we were unable to provide the graduation ceremony as part of this intervention, but everyone agreed in the post-evaluation of the intervention, that providing a closing ceremony is important.

The literature review also revealed the importance of relationships for young adults. The research reveals that young adults strongly desire relationships with seasoned adults, outside of their parents, to help them navigate the turbulent seas of young adulthood. Therefore, participants were offered access to mentors at each session for greater one-on-one discussion. Context associates also served as workshop facilitators and life coaches. Mentors/life coaches were encouraged to pray three times a week for all mentees, to engage mentees in conversation concerning the information presented in the weekly sessions, and provide spiritual wisdom and guidance.

Once a participant accepted their invitation to the discipleship experience, they were given a pre-intervention survey to evaluate their current understanding of Christianity, their beliefs concerning church attendance and relevancy, and personal and professional goals. This data were compared against the post-intervention survey data, which was collected at the conclusion of all sessions to determine the impact of the

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[3] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 160.

discipleship intervention. The goal of the pre- and post-intervention surveys was to determine the importance/relevance of the information to young adults, and to examine if the church's provision of these workshops influences their understanding of Christianity and its relevance to their lives, as well as to determine if the discipleship experience encourages them to be more involved in the church. Upon completion of the five sessions, young adults were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews or a focus group and complete a survey concerning young adults and regular church attendance and involvement.

Participants received two movie passes for each week that they attend workshops, and were eligible for special incentive prizes if they complete all five sessions (i.e., trip to Catalina Island, Big Bear Lake day of fun, concerts or sports, etc.). They were also offered incentives to help ensure their attendance, such as stipends for gas money to drive to the sessions.

Data Collection

This project used qualitative data to assess the experience of young adults in the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions and mentorship process. Participants were given pre- and post-intervention surveys to capture their church attendance, knowledge of the Bible, involvement in evangelism and expectations from the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering series. For triangulation, to insure the validity and reliability of the data, participants completed post-intervention evaluation surveys and were invited to participate in post-intervention interviews to capture their experience.

Measurement/Instruments

Measurement of the project was completed through the use of pre- and post-tests and open-ended survey questions. The researcher utilized the tool of data triangulation as the method to discover overlapping themes, beliefs, attitudes, values and behavioral patterns that emerged from the data collected.

First, the youth survey was printed on blue paper, with a "kid-friendly" font so it would not look too official, to allow for honest and open responses. The parent/significant adult survey, given that title based on the participants' current family dynamics, was printed on pink paper for easy identification, with questions that spoke to the needs and concerns of the parents. Some children were raised by grandparents and other family members outside of their biological parents, so this was an effort to make everyone feel included. Lastly, the educator's survey was printed on a different color as well, which allowed easy identification by the researcher.

Summary

The researcher is a pastor and social worker in an urban setting in Corona, CA. Social Workers and Pastors are always looking for innovative, strategic and research-based strategies to motivate parishioners, increase spiritual and social comprehension, and retain information that is applicable. It is also the belief that through these interventions, participants usually begin to have a better sense of self-worth and value, therefore raising their self-esteem.

Timeline

Training meetings and recruitment for workshops took place from May 2014 to August 2014. During these training meetings, contextual associates worked with the D.Min candidate to create each workshop. The goal was to create a facilitator's manual for those who would lead sessions and a mini-workbook that would be used by young adults who participated in the project. It is important to address what researchers at the Barna Group have labeled as the "shallow" factor. Too often, programs targeting young adults lack content, and it was our goal to insure that young adults gained an experience in this model that allowed them to learn things they did not know before and encouraged them in their walk with God.

The discipleship sessions were offered on Thursday evenings beginning in September 2014. All sessions were finished by November 1, 2014. All data were reviewed from November 1, 2014 to December 1, 2014.

The professional associates were Dr. Najuma Pollard-Smith, D.Min., Dr. Nazleen Bharmal, Ph.D., Dr. Diane Dieckmeyer, and Dr. Lamar Mickey, Ed. The context associates were Destiny Jones, Mariah Horace, Lawrence White, Cynthia Woods, Errol Brown, Kaleena Gordon, Malika Stanley, Danielle McClain, Zetroy Ewart, Dexter Robinson and Tanisha Robinson. The peer associates were Kevin Patterson, Charolyn Jones, Candace Cole-Kelly and Barry Settle.

Numerous planning meetings and phases were created to insure the integrity of the model. The research model was created to prayerfully become a model that can be replicated in other churches that are seeking to recruit and retain young adults.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Dr. Doug Powe, in his book *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African-American Congregations Can Reach New Generations*, states:

> African-American congregations are trying to impact the culture using the same assumptions used during the Civil Rights and Black Consciousness generations, but the culture has shifted. African-American congregations are trying to be invitational in the same ways they have always been in the past, but the culture has shifted. African-American congregations are trying to ignite a flame in individuals in the same way they did during the Civil Right and Black Consciousness generations, but the culture has shifted. It is time for African-American congregations to rethink their assumptions and to reconnect to the shifting culture.[1]

Corona Community AME Church, the context of this project, seeks to respond positively and proactively to the shift in culture, to reach the millennial generation that is presently missing from our church. There have been numerous suggestions by varying authors advancing a plethora of theories and suggestions for reaching millennials, which have helped us conclude that there is no one size fits all approach. For this project, the researcher believes it is most appropriate to take an "eclectic approach" in our desire to recruit and retain young adults in our church. An eclectic paradigm, which is often

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[1] Doug Powe, *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African-American Congregations Can Reach New Generations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 55-57.

applied in economics, "is to merge several isolated theories…in one approach".[2] Eclectic theoretical approaches in social service practice are often most appropriate when working with special populations or ethnic groups, because they are holistic, while still being context specific. This approach recognizes that there are often a wide range of contributing factors to a person or groups behavior, and encourages the practitioner to acknowledge those differences in its engagement of that population. Within this project, the researcher have gained incredible wisdom from the hip hop church theories, adult education theories, Erikson's psychosocial development theory and a host of other theories advanced by authors, pastors, teachers and laypersons who seek to reach young adults. This eclectic approach has led the researcher to the creation of a unique pilot program called "Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering". The program targets young adults ages eighteen to thirty. The goal for this project is to engage twelve young adults in specially designed discipleship sessions, combined with providing these young adults with one-on-one mentoring over six consecutive weeks, and to examine if this intervention increased their desire to attend church, enhance their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and encourage others to Christ. The researcher implemented this project in a few phases, understanding that each component required detailed attention if the project was to be successful. The phases of this project were planning, curriculum and program design, recruitment, implementation and evaluation.

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[2] Antje Hagen, "Deutsche Direktinvestitonen in Grossbritannien, 1871-1918" (Dissertation, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), 32.

Planning Phase

During the planning phase, the pastor led a presentation of the research for the project to attending context associates, and general brainstorming sessions concerning the research were held, guided by specific questions concerning what Corona Community African Methodist Episcopal Church (CCAME) could implement. These planning sessions were instrumental in: (1) facilitating the engagement of other leaders within the church who had an interest in working with young adults, (2) identifying and appropriating resources for the pilot program, (3) creating an excitement and understanding of the need for this new ministry within our church, and (4) the involvement of young adults in shaping the process and experience. Arguably, one of the most crucial components of this process was the involvement of young adults in the planning of this project. Their voices, ideas and involvement provided ownership, realness and guidance to the process.

The planning process was six months in duration, and we quickly discovered that seeking to launch a ministry like this without proper planning would have been very unsuccessful. Simply identifying the need for this ministry and having someone who wanted to lead it was not enough. The planning sessions revealed that young adults wanted something that would be consistent, organized, relevant, comprehensive and engaging. It needed to be life-changing and fun at the same time. It needed to give them information and inspire them to want to utilize the information. It needed to lead them to Christ, but not be too "churchy". They want to be led, but they also want to be included in the leadership and shaping of the experience. They were looking for something that

was spiritual but also social. Unlike other ministries at CCAME, where we have been able to simply hand the baton to an informed and inspired layperson to recruit a few others and launch the ministry, this process was much different. Everyone involved knew that it would be hard to simply get twelve young adults to show up, and if we blew it, we'd probably never get another shot.

During our planning process, we developed our curriculum and program design phases for the launching of this ministry.

Curriculum and Program Design Phase

Among the context associates, a group of four individuals that included the pastor agreed to work on designing the curriculum and program. Keeping in front of us the many suggestions from the focus groups/meetings held during the planning phase, we proceeded with discussing what each workshop should look like, the experience we wanted young adult participants to have, and the outcomes we hoped they would be able to communicate about their experience in the program. In response to the research and what young adults at CCAME stated they were interested in, we decided to focus all sessions and mentoring on essentially three areas: life planning, healthy relationships and financial management. PowerPoint presentations and workbooks were created along these themes for all five sessions. We explored God's Word around these thematic areas, and we dissected select scriptures or biblical stories in an effort to extract life applicable points for participants. We carefully selected images, videos and music within the PowerPoint presentations that young adults would connect with, even some that

contained vulgar language but successfully communicated our driving point. There was a little push back in the use of some examples and media chosen for this project, but we kept coming back to being real, and while we never would disrespect God's house, we knew there would be some things that needed to be said in a raw way.

Fill-in-the-blank workbooks that matched the PowerPoint presentations were created and distributed at the beginning of each session to insure that participants were retaining the information presented and had something physical to take home with them after each session. PowerPoint presentations were carefully crafted to present God's Word as the leading idea, and then to introduce practical steps that participants could take to implement the idea into their lives. The key was to insure that everything began with how God has called us to live, not to use God to endorse what we want out of life. Sessions were created to be ninety minutes in duration and to encourage interactivity.

For the mentoring component, we had a lot of ideas of how we envisioned this process. Our first goal was to have one mentor per each attendee, and to assign each participant to a mentor who would serve as a life coach during the project period. Unfortunately, time did not permit us to move forward with this goal, as we lacked adequate time to recruit and train prospective mentors for the mentoring process. Since we did have a few adults who desired to serve as mentors, we considered a group mentoring process, in which one mentor would be assigned three mentees. This appeared to be a great model, but met severe challenges right before our time to launch the project, as two of the prospective mentors experienced life emergencies that removed them from the process. We understood that the mentoring component was crucial to this ministry, so we knew we could not eliminate the mentoring component, although we felt inclined to

do so more than a few times. Instead, we amended the mentoring component of this model to having adult mentors present at each teaching session (not enough for each attendee to have their own mentor, but at least two adults present for each session), and attendees were encouraged to connect with a mentor following all sessions. Mentors led attendees into deeper reflections and dialogue concerning the given topic of the day.

Recruitment Phase

Given our excitement during the planning phase and the curriculum and program design phase, our planning team naively felt that the general church would be equally excited once we presented the program to them. Our goal was to recruit twelve young people, and for one month we announced the coming program during church services, in weekly bulletins and via email. Our response was little to none. After four weeks, we had only four young adults that made commitments to be a part of the program. During the announcement time of our worship services, we encouraged parents to tell their young adult children, many who were at home because they don't attend church, to get involved in this ministry. Our responses were still low. At the suggestion of one of our context associates, we scrolled through the church roster and identified about thirty young adults that we had email addresses for. We decided to send an email to all of them to invite them to this ministry. About four young adults responded, which brought our number to eight, but much less than the twelve we anticipated.

A week before our scheduled launch date, we met and one of the young people on the planning committee stated that she hadn't checked her email, so she never saw

anything about the program. She then asked us, "Have you sent out invites through text, Instagram or Facebook?" Our response was, "No". We thought email and church announcements would be most appropriate. The young lady explained that this generation communicates most via texting, Snapchats and social media, even for parties, not email because "email is so slow". Immediately, after using text messages and Instagram to promote further, responses came in confirming attendance. In just a few hours, we had twenty young adults confirmed to be in attendance for our first session.

From this process, we learned to do all of our communication with our young adults via text messaging. The church invested in a program that allows us to send out mass text messages each week, and it has been very successful with reaching our young adults. We have not set up our own Snapchat or Instagram, but instead have relied on others in the group to utilize their personal Kik, Snapchat or Instagram to reach others. But for the future, we need to use these tools, as they are the predominant tools this generation is using to communicate.

In addition to using text messaging and social media, using charismatic young adults to reach other young adults must not be overlooked. What we discovered is that even though many of our young adults may not see each other at church regularly, they are friends and they do see each other and communicate with one another outside of the church. Including them in the recruitment process is very important, as young adults are more likely to show up when one of their peers has requested their presence.

As a follow up, and sometimes as an initial approach, the pastor made personal calls to everyone who either stated they would attend or those we hadn't heard from. The personal calls from the pastor yielded great results, from which young adults gave their

word that they would be present for the sessions. It led us to understand a few things. First, this generation respects position and really appreciated the pastor reaching out to them. Some said it made them feel special. Secondly, this generation is looking for authentic relationships. Knowing that their pastor cares for them, is checking on them, and wants to see them motivated these young adults to attend. The conversations were very brief, but they were significant when the participants were asked what motivated them to attend.

Just as our approach theoretically is eclectic, I believe any successful recruitment effort of young adults must be eclectic as well. It will call for a variety of approaches and a concerted effort to reach them in the way they communicate, not the way we think they should communicate. While my generation still heavily relies on email as a great form of communication, this generation uses text messaging and faster mediums to communicate. Seeking to reach this group via postal mail, email or general church announcements will be ineffective and may be a good clue as to why many young adults are missing from our churches. It may not be that they are not interested, as much as it may be that we are using the wrong tools to try to reach them.

We provided an incentive for the young adults to attend. Attendees were promised dinner, which was catered for our first meeting. Following our first meeting, three participants within the group stated they were currently in culinary schools and wanted to trade off with one another on preparing the dinner for each session. As an incentive, the money that was budgeted for catering was given to those participants who prepared the dinners. Each week, they earned $100. In addition to providing dinner, we provided a $15

gas stipend for those who needed it. About one-fifth of the participants used the gas stipend, with the remaining students carpooling or not requiring any additional assistance.

While the provision of incentives was costly – nearly $175 per week – it was an important component to eliminate any potential barriers to participants being in regular attendance. While participants did not come to the group solely for the dinner or the gas, it was very beneficial to them. After the fourth session, we continued to offer dinner but no longer offered the gas incentives, and attendance remained consistent.

Implementation Phase

Selecting a day for the project was difficult, as space is limited at the church with so many programs occurring throughout the week and certain days were unsuitable for the young adults. Immediately, Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays were eliminated. Mondays and Wednesdays were eliminated due to schedule conflicts at the church. Fridays and Saturdays were conflicts for more than a few of the young adults, as they often worked jobs that occupied their weekends. Many of the participants were presently pursuing a post secondary education, making their weekends the most ideal time for socializing and employment. The young adults on our planning committee advised us to stay away from those dates. Tuesdays were not good days due to another event that takes place locally that attracts young adults, and running our group during that time would cause a serious conflict on attracting the crowd we wanted. We initially planned an orientation on a Sunday, which was very well attended with about thirty young adults; however, it made the day very long after two worship services, and the

young adults felt like they could just choose between going to church or coming to the group so they wouldn't have to be in church all day.

Thus, Thursdays became the best day for program implementation. We chose to meet at 7:15 p.m., which allowed for participants to have enough time to get to the church. Our plan was to run groups from 7:15-8:45 p.m.

For our first session, we had twenty-seven attendees and three mentors present. Attendees were given a pre-survey as they entered the room, but not all were collected at the end of the session. As attendees arrived, censored hip hop music played loudly in our conference room. Many of them were shocked to hear secular hip hop playing at church, and as many of them took their seats, they were singing along with the lyrics and obviously enjoying the vibe. We continued this pattern every session, playing hip hop music before and after each session. The music helped to create what participants called a kick-back environment that made them feel like something different was taking place, even though they were at church. There were a few times where we shuffled the music to include Christian hip hop artists, but it was clear that there was a difference. The secular music created a more relaxing environment and a familiarity for those in attendance.

We started the first session with everyone introducing themselves. The introductions were very important, as participants were asked to share their name, why they were attending this group and what they were doing in their lives right now. Participants were encouraged to listen closely to each participant's introduction and to make a special effort during the break to connect with those who shared similar interests. Many participants established great connections with other young adults following these introductions. For example, one young man who introduced himself shared that he was in

the interviewing process for the Sheriff's Department. Upon hearing this, another young man his same age stated that he was interested, but had a lot of questions about the process. After the first group, those two gentlemen talked for more than one hour and have formed a supportive relationship for one another. Presently, they are both in the process of entering the law enforcement profession. Likewise, the participants in culinary school have created a close bond and are now discussing starting a business with one another.

Following the personal introductions, we started the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prosperous Session One curriculum packet. Session One focused on life planning and had three objectives: (1) Encourage understanding and following the biblical message on living a successful life, (2) enhance participants understanding of the Bible, Christianity and the importance of the Church, and (3) equip participants with life skills to empower themselves and others. Participants were presented statistics describing the current state of young adults in America, and engaged in conversation on the necessary steps to make sure they do not become victim to the pitfalls that have claimed so many in their generation. The group was noticeable shocked by many of the statistics, but shared that many of their friends fit the stereotype of the statistics we were reviewing. The common sentiment of the room was that the young people present did not want to become a statistic. We led participants in a discussion that the one sure way to escape the trap of poverty and failure is to follow God's Word. Participants were taught the importance of unlocking their potential, as well as the enemies of potential. At the conclusion of Session One, we encouraged participants to see themselves through the eyes of the Creator and to

imagine the life that He created them to have. Participants were encouraged to go after the life that God intends for them to have, not the life that others want them to have.

The session was incredible, and many of the participants requested if they could invite their friends for the next week. Participants were told they could invite others and many of them did invite others, which was one of our objectives.

In Session Two, entitled "Relationship Success", we had one of the greatest sessions. One of the students prepared dinner for the evening and we had about ten additional attendees. We ran out of chairs, and there was standing room only in our conference room. Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering Session Two began with a discussion on relationships, specifically male-female relationships. As we worked through the curriculum, which taught students about the reasons relationships fail and how to make relationships work, it was clear that this was an area of major battle for the young adults. A few of the young adults shared that they were already parents and how difficult it is to be a parent without marriage. Many students expressed regret over not doing things "God's way" and how experimenting has caused a lot of grief in their lives. Even more of the students expressed disappointment that their parents did not give them a better example, and many felt like the troubles they were experiencing in relationships were due to some of the issues they had with their respective parents. Three of the young ladies present shared extensively about being victims of domestic violence. One of the young ladies that shared her story was on our planning committee and as she shared her story amongst her peers, there were many who were brought to tears. We invited this young lady to be our preacher for our Youth Sunday services, in which she addressed how her departure from church led her to being an easy victim of domestic violence.

Young adults attended the service because she was speaking, and one of the tougher young ladies in the church came forward to give her life to Christ and to join the church, stating that she, too, had been in an abusive relationship for more than ten years and this was the first time she felt courageous enough to say it out loud.

Many of the young men shared some of their difficulties in being a good guy, because it seems like most of the young ladies don't want good guys. We discussed the importance of holding to God's commands, even at the risk of being alone. This session, which was supposed to be ninety minutes, was nearly three hours in length, with many of the attendees begging for it to continue. Even at the conclusion of the group, many of the attendees remained at the church socializing with their peers and mentors about the content of the session for nearly ninety minutes. It was after midnight when everyone had vacated the church.

At Session Three, there was palpable enthusiasm in the room as participants were clearly excited about getting back into the conversation on relationships. One of the young ladies present explained that she had a date scheduled for the weekend and really wanted to know some rules she should abide by. The Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering curriculum for Session Three focuses on how to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and important rules to follow for dating as a Christian. Participants were introduced to the biblical story of Jacob and Rachel, and surprisingly many of them were unfamiliar with this story in the Bible and were intrigued with the principles for dating that were extracted from the story. We used this to encourage participants to read their Bibles, as the Bible contains wonderful knowledge that could help them live prosperous lives.

In addition to discussing what qualities participants should look for in others, participants were challenged to be the kind of person they want to date. Many participants shared that they were not presently in a suitable place for a relationship but wanted to be in a relationship. Participants were taught the importance of having positive self-esteem, purpose, vision and discipline. Participants learned that before they could establish a healthy relationship with anyone else, they needed to take the time to have a great relationship with God and themselves.

Session Three lasted for nearly three hours, and many of the participants requested that we move from meeting once per week to twice per week. Additionally, participants began to express their desire to see groups extend beyond the five sessions planned for the project. This week, we concluded the group with asking each person to share something special that they have learned from the sessions thus far. Participants were very reflective as they shared their thoughts and the need for more Christian-based life-applicable teaching. A few of the newcomers to the group expressed that this was the best church service they had ever been to. Our team came to understand that many of the young adults considered this group to be their church and preferred this style of learning about God versus traditional church.

In Session Four, entitled "Financial Management", participants were taught the importance of living above the level of mediocrity. There was a little decrease in attendance in this session, as about six participants had other arrangements. However, we continued to have newcomers into the group so the room remained full. Participants watched a video on the difference between having a job and a career, and explored the importance of identifying their purpose before they even think about making money.

Many of the participants revealed that they were unsure of what their purpose was and asked a lot of questions around discovering their purpose.

Participants were led through some exploratory exercises to discover their purpose, and encouraged to seek God more concerning their purpose. We explained to attendees that like the title of this program, they can be young, gifted and saved, but if they do not discover their purpose, they will never be as prosperous as God intends for them to be. We discovered that many students had never thought about seeking God for their career choice. Instead, many of the participants had picked their majors or career path based upon how much money they could make and their parents' expectations. There appeared to be a clarity that came over the group as we discussed it makes sense to pursue God first and then trust Him to provide for their future.

Beyond identifying purpose, participants were presented with some basic habits of successful people. Participants were led through scriptures that shared the importance of hard work, along with faith, to reap rewards. We discussed fighting mediocrity, laziness and procrastination. Participants watched a popular video on the Internet about success. Many of the participants really identified with the video, and some said they had seen the video before, but stated that seeing it within this context made it much more enlightening. Attendees were challenged to create a hunger for success in their lives. Participants could see that there were major gaps between their beliefs concerning their lives and their behavior to actualize their beliefs. Our goal in Session Four was to bridge the gap between beliefs and behaviors, encouraging participants to walk in the abundant life God created them to have.

Session Four was about two hours in length. Participants requested that sessions continue past our scheduled last session, and the group voted to keep the sessions going beyond the project.

Session Five, entitled "Financial and Life Success: The Path" provided participants with basic money management skills, including budgeting, saving, spending tips and investing. We saw the return of some of the participants that were missing from the previous week. Participants were very excited to learn about money and asked a lot of questions. Many of them shared that no one had ever taught them about money and requested more sessions on money management.

Many participants falsely believed that "money is the root of all evil", but we shared with participants that the aforementioned statement is a misinterpretation of the Biblical text, which states, "for the love of money is the root of all evil". We discussed how having money can actually enable us to serve the kingdom of God in a greater way, and shared scriptures with participants that can lead to prosperous living. Participants were presented with extensive financial management worksheets in their weekly packet and were given an extensive booklist to supplement the information provided in the session.

At the end of the session, participants were presented a post-survey evaluation. Following the final session, numerous parents expressed the transformation they had noticed within their young adult children because of the group. These respective parents thanked the church for providing such guidance and expressed how difficult it used to be to get their young adult children to go to church, but now their young adult children were

excited to come to church, even on a Thursday. Session Five was two and a half hours in duration, and many participants hung out after the group discussing their financial plans.

Evaluation Phase

Pre- and Post-surveys

Participants were given a pre-intervention survey and completed a similar survey after the five interventions. These surveys consisted of twelve statements in which participants were asked to select the most appropriate answer for themselves between "not true", "somewhat" and "true". On question one, in which participants were given the statement, "My relationship with God is very important in determining my choices in relationships, education and career paths", there was a 4% increase in respondents stating this statement was "true" for them following the intervention. This increase in percentage points demonstrates that the intervention increased participants' understanding of the importance of their faith in God in the central areas of their lives. One of our goals was to help participants see the importance of their relationship with God during young adulthood for direction with the major decisions they are making concerning their lives.

Statement two said, "Most of my friends believe in God and their faith is clearly demonstrated in their language, actions and choices." In the pre-survey, 70% of respondents said this was "somewhat" true and 20% of respondents stated this statement was "true". However in the post-survey, when presented the same statement, 79% of respondents stated that this is "somewhat" true and only 14% stated that it was "true" for them. This was a shocking finding considering our expectation was that the number of

participants responding "true" to this statement would increase, not decrease. However, in follow-up interviews, many of the participants acknowledged that participation in the program has allowed them to be more honest in evaluating their peers, and their responses in the post-survey reflect their understanding of what it means to be a true Christian and to live righteously. Thus, the intervention was successful in getting participants to assess their relationships, while not necessarily successful in having participants change their peer group.

Statement three said, "It's important to regularly attend church." In the pre-survey, 60% of respondents said this statement was "true", 30% stated it was "somewhat" true and 10% said it was "not true". In the post-survey, 0% of respondents said this statement was "not true", 29% said it was "somewhat" true and 71% said this statement was "true". The 11% increase in participants feeling that regular church attendance is important was very encouraging and demonstrated that the intervention encouraged church attendance. In follow-up interviews, many participants stated that they preferred these sessions to regular church services, and many participants who did not previously attend a church stated that they considered their weekly attendance at these meetings to be "church" for them. One of our objectives in this pilot program was to see if this intervention would increase participants' value of church attendance, and we certainly see a positive correlation. However, how this generation defines "church" may be very different than what previous generations have considered "church". For example, as Christians we generally think of Sunday worship as church attendance, and participants in this study viewed church as any day of the week where they were present and learning about the Lord. While corporate worship is important, the participants in this study were

looking for an experience that taught them how to practically implement the teachings of Christ, something they don't necessarily feel is done during Sunday worship services.

Statement four said, "I am comfortable with my understanding of the Bible and the teachings of Christ." In the pre-survey, 10% of respondents marked "not true", 40% of respondents marked "somewhat" and 50% of respondents marked "true". In the post-survey, 7% marked "not true", 71% marked "somewhat" and only 21% marked "true". Our initial expectation was to see an increase in participants who were comfortable with their understanding of the Bible due to the intervention. However, our finding revealed that participants who previously may have felt strong about their knowledge of the Bible only felt moderately comfortable with their knowledge of scripture following the intervention. In the follow-up interviews, many participants shared that the intervention made them aware that there was a lot in the Bible that they did not know, as themes and stories that were not regularly preached upon in church were shared during the intervention. Therefore, the nearly 50% decrease in participants feeling positively comfortable in their understanding of the Bible was not a bad thing. It revealed that the intervention may have helped participants understand that the Bible is greater than they previously believed. The follow-up interviews revealed that this change actually signified an increase in the number of young adults who now see the Bible as an important guide for their lives.

Statement five said, "My life is a great example to others of what being a Christian is all about." In the pre-survey, 40% of respondents stated that this was "not true", 50% stated that it was "somewhat" true and 10% stated that this was "true". In the post-survey, 14% of respondents marked "not true", 79% of respondents marked

"somewhat" and 7% of respondents marked "true". We were encouraged to see the nearly 30% decrease in the number of respondents that moved from believing they were not a good example to others of being a Christian to the jump in many believing they had become a better example to others since participating in the intervention. These results aligned perfectly with the follow-up interviews that were conducted, in which all participants shared how their participation in the intervention has made them a better person. In fact, a few of the context associates confirmed that parents of many of the young adults had expressed their thanks for these groups at the church, as they had witnessed great growth in their children at home. We concluded from these findings that the intervention, even for just five weeks, had a positive impact upon participants' behavior.

Statement six said, "I am regularly engaged in bringing others to Christ." In the pre-survey, 50% of respondents marked this "not true", 40% marked "somewhat" and 10% marked that this was "true". In the post-survey, 50% marked "not true", 21% marked "somewhat" and 29% marked "true". The most significant finding on this question of discipleship is the 19% increase among participants that marked "true" regarding their regular activity in bringing others to Christ following the intervention. In follow-up interviews, participants shared that they were not only comfortable discussing with their friends what they were learning at the group, but many of them shared that they were regularly inviting friends and family members that they believed could benefit from the classes. In the follow-up interviewing, we discovered that most participants associated bringing a friend to the classes as being synonymous with bringing them to Christ or leading them to accepting Christ as their personal Savior. Participants may not

have gained the skills to lead their unsaved friends to a personal relationship with Christ during our five-week intervention; however, the increase in participants who began inviting others to church where they could come to accept Christ as their personal Savior was very promising.

Statement seven said, "I am very strong in my understanding of Christianity." In the pre-survey, 5% of respondents marked "not true", 20% of respondents marked "somewhat" and 75% of respondents marked "true". In the post-survey, 0% marked "not true", 43% marked "somewhat" and 57% marked "true". Follow-up interviews revealed that many participants learned new information about the Bible and the Christian faith during the intervention, which made them aware that they did not understand Christianity as strongly as they previously believed. Many participants expressed a desire to learn more about the Bible, Christian history and Christian theology.

Statement eight said, "Attending church and growing in my faith are essential to me being successful in life." In the pre-survey, 5% of respondents marked "not true", 20% of respondents marked "somewhat" and 75% of respondents marked "true". In the post-survey, 0% of respondents marked "not true", 29% marked "somewhat" and 71% marked "true". Our expectation to this question was to see an increase in the percentage of respondents that stated affirmatively that attending church and growing in their faith was essential to being successful; however, we found different results. Post-intervention interviews revealed that there was a projection concerning their parents for many participants on this question. A significant number of participants felt like their parents attend church, but it has not translated into success. Conversely, there was a considerable group of participants whose parents do not attend church, yet they see them as successful

in life. The findings on this statement reveal that the intervention did little to change participants linking church attendance to successful living, as they are more impacted by what they see around them via their parents and other adults. Limiting the mentorship component of this model probably affected the desired outcome, in which we hoped participants would connect successful living with church attendance. In the end, participants will believe what they "see", not simply what they "hear". If they see more people within the church that are living successful lives, they will be more inclined to attend church. However, the common idea amongst our participants was, "If it hasn't helped them, how will it help me?" In this question, participants seemingly differentiated the class from traditional worship and stated that they believe classes like the intervention offered will help them be successful, but simple church attendance does not necessarily bring successful living.

Statement nine said, "I believe churches need to hold special sessions outside of weekly worship services to teach young adults life skills according to the Bible." In the pre-survey, 20% of respondents marked "somewhat" and 80% of respondents marked "true". In the post-survey, 100% of respondents marked "true", stating that they believing churches need to offer special interventions for young adults. We were pleased to see that all of the respondents believe classes like the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering program were important and should be offered by more churches. In post-intervention interviews, participants shared that most young adults are looking for classes like these, in which they can learn about the Bible in a way that isn't "preachy", but is real and relevant. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently used the terms "real" and

"relevant" to describe the intervention, and the common belief was that more young adults would attend church if the Bible was presented differently in those ways.

Statement ten said, "I believe many young adults make life-altering mistakes, when they are disconnected from God and church." In the pre-survey, 5% of respondents marked "not true", 30% marked "somewhat" and 65% of respondents marked "true". In the post-survey, 0% marked "not true", 14% of respondents marked "somewhat" and 86% marked "true". The decrease in participants from "somewhat" true to those that responded "true" to this statement revealed that the intervention was very impactful in helping participants identify the dangers in disconnecting from God and the church. In post-intervention interviews, many participants shared how their lives changed drastically upon graduation from high school, and once they were no longer regularly attending church, they began making poor decisions about relationships, alcohol and drug use, sex and general life decisions. Participants believe the class has helped them "get back on track" and they feel "more confident" and like "an emptiness has been filled" since attending the classes.

Statement eleven said, "I am completely comfortable with where I am in my spiritual and personal growth." In the pre-survey, 20% of respondents marked "not true", 35% marked "somewhat" and 45% marked "true". In the post-survey, 14% marked "not true", 50% marked "somewhat" and 36% marked "true". The most significant change among respondents for this statement was in the "somewhat" true category, which either meant that participants feel less comfortable about their spiritual maturity due to the intervention or that the intervention allowed them to see room for growth. In post-

intervention interviews, participants shared a common desire and enthusiasm to grow spiritually, and they credited the intervention for being the catalyst.

Statement twelve said, "I could use additional teaching and support to insure that I stay on God's path for my life." In the pre-survey, 5% of respondents marked "not true", 10% marked "somewhat" and 85% marked "true". In the post-survey, 0% of respondents marked "not true", 7% marked "somewhat" and 93% marked "true". These findings demonstrated that participants found the classes to be beneficial to helping them stay focused. In post-intervention interviews, many participants shared that they had known they were missing direction in their life, but didn't know where to get it. Those interviewed discussed how their involvement in the intervention had helped them "understand things better", "make better decisions", "be more motivated" and "desire to be more Godly". Participants stated that they believed the classes need to continue, because they were unsure of where they would get direction if the classes end. A few participants said things will "be bad for me" if they did not have the classes to attend.

Program Evaluation Forms

To confirm the validity and reliability of the pre- and post-surveys, participants were interviewed following the intervention and completed a post-intervention evaluation form. In the post-evaluation form, participants were given seven questions directly related to the intervention and were given multiple choice responses. In question one, participants were asked, "Attending the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions has: (a) Made an incredible impact upon my life, encouraging me to live more as God has

called me to live; (b) Has been good, but has not necessarily made me think of making changes to my life; or (c) Has not been helpful nor enjoyable. A total 100% of respondents marked (a) as their response, stating that the intervention made an incredible impact upon their lives and encouraged them to live more as God had called them to. The question was created to measure the impact the sessions had on participants' lives. The results revealed that, overwhelmingly, respondents believed that the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering classes had been life-changing and brought them closer to God.

Question two on the post-intervention evaluation said, "I kept attending the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions because: (a) The food; (b) The gas money; (c) The life-enriching lessons, the fellowship with other young adults and for guidance in my life; (d) Someone made me go. A total 100% of respondents marked (c) as their answer, demonstrating that while the incentives were helpful, they were not the driving force behind participant attendance. Participants were clear that the greatest benefits from attending Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering were the information being presented, the connection with other young adults and the wisdom and counsel they received while in attendance. One of the concerns amongst the context associates early on was that young adults might only attend for the incentives and, therefore, we should not provide incentives. However, another contingency within the group suggested that the incentives could serve as "bait" to get participants engaged, but that they would become self-motivated beyond the incentives once they began attending the sessions. The unanimous response to this question suggests that participants became self-motivated to attend the groups, as the intervention fulfilled a deeper spiritual, emotional and intellectual need in their lives.

In question three on the post-evaluation form, participants were asked, "During the course of the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions, I invited others to come to the class with me: (a) No; (b) Yes, 1-2 persons; (c) Yes, 3 or more persons." A total of 21% of respondents stated that they did not invite anyone during the five-week intervention, 71% of respondents stated that they invited 1-2 persons and 7% invited 3 or more persons to the group. Our expectation in the model was to encourage young adults to bring more young adults to church. Our findings show that after just five weeks, 78% of participants felt comfortable to invite friends to attend sessions. During post-interviews, we learned that some participants were disappointed that some of the friends that they invited did not show up to a class. Most participants who invited others shared that they had difficulty trying to explain to their peers that it wasn't a "regular church service". Their friends were not interested in going to a regular church service, and participants faced challenges when trying to describe the group to their peers. In a few cases, participants shared that some of those they invited faced work schedule and transportation conflicts; however, they believed that their friends would attend in the future.

In question four of the post-evaluation form, participants were asked, "I believe the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions should be: (a) 3-4 sessions; (b) 6 sessions; (c) Ongoing sessions." At total of 100% of respondents stated that Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions should be ongoing. This is consistent with the sentiments expressed in post-intervention interviews in which participants expressed their desire to continue in the classes, and even shared topics/themes they think future classes should cover. The planning committee and the curriculum and program design

committees went back and forth concerning the length of the classes for this project, and due to time constraints, we settled on five sessions, as the majority of the group believed six to eight would be sufficient. However, we have learned from this process that young adults want and need a more extensive program to support them in their spiritual, vocational and personal development.

In question five of the evaluation form, participants were asked, "The Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions are helping me grow in my relationship with Jesus Christ and giving me a better understanding of my faith: (a) Yes; (b) No." A total of 100% of respondents marked (a) as their answer, demonstrating that participants felt like the intervention had led them to significant spiritual growth. In the beginning of this project, the hypothesis was that a discipleship group such as Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering would lead young adults to a deeper personal walk with Christ and a better understanding of Christian teachings. Participants overwhelmingly expressed that this objective was met for them.

In question six of the evaluation form, participants were asked, "I believe more young adults would be involved in church if there were more programs like Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering: (a) Yes; (b) No." A total of 100% of respondents marked (a) as their answer, demonstrating that participants believed that churches that offer programs like Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering will see an increase in young adult engagement. According to post-intervention interviews, young adult engagement may not always translate into young adults attending Sunday church services, but it will lead to a more God-led generation that builds its foundation for career and family upon God's Word.

In the last question of the evaluation form, participants were asked, "I believe with proper training, I could one day teach the sessions of Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering to young adults: (a) Yes; (b) No." A total of 93% of respondents believed that with the proper training, they would be able to effectively teach Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions. During our planning phase, one of our desires was to create a program in which young adults expressed a desire and ability to reach other young adults for Christ. Early in the process, our planning committee envisioned preparing young adult participants to become teachers and leaders of programs such as Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering. While the preparation of the participants in this project to be teachers was beyond the scope of this pilot, we believe it is the most promising way to create a dissemination model of the program that can be shared with other churches.

Post-intervention Interviews

Eight participants agreed to interviews concerning their participation in the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering program. Three of the interviewees are not members of Corona Community AME Church or any church, for that matter. Two of the interviewees are members of CCAME, but are not in regular attendance, and the last three interviewees are regular church attendees. Each interview was about fifteen minutes in duration in which participants were asked three very general questions concerning their experience in the program. Below is a summation of the responses given to the questions below.

Interview question one was, "Describe your overall experience in Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering." Summary responses to this question are as follows:

> I feel like my entire life has changed. I'm a completely new person. Prior to coming to this class, I admit I was smoking weed regularly, having sex, turning up, and doing a lot of other things that I knew were wrong, but I was just out there. This class got me to see that I need to walk away from those things and reminded me that my life is meant to be greater. Funny thing is, my mom had been telling me the stuff you've been teaching us in the classes, but I just wasn't hearing it from her.

Another interviewee responded to question one by saying,

> I really didn't know what to expect at first, but I promised you I would be here so I came. But after the first session, I was hooked. Everything was presented in a down-to-earth manner, and each session addressed things that I am currently going through in my life. I'm so glad I didn't flake out.

In response to this same question another interviewee stated,

> This program needs to be everywhere. My family doesn't go to church, and I was real hesitant in coming because I already had in my head what was going to happen. But all the sessions were so good, I literally look forward to Thursdays and I now bring my little sister and her two friends to every session. It's really opened my eyes.

For interview question number two, interviewees were asked, "What are some of the major things you feel like you learned?" One respondent said, "I learned how to seek God in everything, including my relationships, something I wish I would've done before I got married."

Another interviewee shared,

> I really appreciated the sessions on creating a life plan and being challenged to write my plan down on paper. I always feel like I have a million thoughts jammed

> in my head and now I feel like it's on paper, I can see it, and I know how to make things happen.

Another interviewee responded by saying,

> I really needed the financial management. I've been so stressed over my credit card bills, car note and everything, and my parent's haven't helped me at all. I feel like I finally have some peace because of what I have learned.

Another interviewee shared,

> I feel like I learned how to be an adult. Like, I realized in this program that I'm a big kid. Everyone gets frustrated with me because they expect me to know how to do certain things, and I'm like, 'I don't know how to do that.' Before, I didn't know what they wanted out of me, now I feel like I know more of what to do. Plus, I can't live my life for them. I need to seek God and find out what He wants me to do. That's the biggest lesson for me.

For interview question number three, interviewees were asked, "What are some things you think should be done differently in the program?" One interviewee shared, "I wish classes were offered more frequently. I'd be willing to come twice a week."

Another interviewee said,

> There were a few times when class was almost three hours, and it became too late for me to stay. I think we should start on time and end on time, so no one has to miss information. I felt bad when I had to leave but I needed to put my kids to sleep.

Another interviewee shared,

> It would be nice to have it in a bigger room, because we often ran out of seats and then some people would just have to stand or sit along the walls. Not having much more space might discourage people from inviting their friends 'cause there won't be anywhere for them to sit.

Another interviewee shared,

> Everyone should be given a Bible and given homework each week. One of the guys I sat next to said he's never had a Bible, and when I gave him one, he didn't know where to begin.

Another interviewee shared,

> I would like to learn more about who wrote the Bible, and more about the beginning of Christianity. A lot of the stuff you covered in the first session was new to me, and I really need to understand my faith better. I always feel like people ask me questions about the Bible or Christianity and I don't feel like I have the answers, so its hard to share something that you can feel in your heart, but you can't explain it. More information to help us verbalize our faith would be good.

Overall, the interviewees offered great insight on how to improve the program. The program has been such a success, so much so that the group requested that it continue past our five-week pilot. The program is now in its twenty-fifth week, with an average of twenty young adults in attendance. The use of multimedia resources, relationship building, relevant teaching and divine guidance has been a blessing for all participants, as well as the program leaders.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Reflection

During this process, we learned some incredible lessons in our desire to reach young adults for Christ. Contrary to the widespread assumptions that young adults have no desire to go to church, learn about Christ, or prescribe to Christianity, we have found that young adults are hungry for the church to present Jesus Christ and Christianity in a real, relevant and practical way so they can develop an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. Young adults possess a thirst for direction and guidance and will voluntarily bring other young adults to church if the message of Christ is being presented in a way that relates to their current station in life.

There were some very insightful lessons that were learned from the mistakes made during the implementation of this project. First, it is clear that young adults need more than a six-week course. Our initial thought was that young adults would not be committed for a period longer than six weeks, especially since during our recruiting process many of the first prospective participants asked, "How long is it going to be?" However, this process revealed that while the initial response suggested that we stick with a shorter time frame, once the young adults were engaged, they found the

information and inspiration they received in the groups to be worthy of a regular commitment. In the future, we believe it would be wise for churches that target young adults to create their programs with a phase system, in which the first phase is a six-week cohort of classes, followed by subsequent phases that could be longer in duration and target more areas of the lives of young adults. Additional phases of the program could engage young adults in missionary work, outreach/social activities, career preparation and much more. Presenting the first phase as a six-session course will encourage young adults to make the commitment to the sessions, and offering subsequent sessions could let them know that there is more that can be offered. Future research could be beneficial in deciding the subject focus of each phase, duration of each phase and the appropriate time of completion of the program. When we decided to continue offering our weekly groups past the six-week sessions, we failed to have an end in mind or identify what would mark completion of our program. Taking time to clearly identify the expected outcomes of participation for each phase could help evaluation of the program's success.

In addition to creating a phase system for young adult ministry, we found many of the young adults requesting that we have a graduation or ceremony at the completion of our first phase. For many of the participants, they were proud of the information they learned and the changes they made in their lives over the six weeks and wanted their respective parents/families to share in this achievement. We planned a graduation ceremony, but were unable to execute it due to time constraints; however, our entire team agreed that a ceremony would have been the most appropriate way to close our five-week course. Having a special ceremony that involved the collective church could encourage the young adults to attend Sunday services, as well as encourage other parishioners with

young adult children or family members to get them involved in the ministry. Throughout the entire process, our young adult program never integrated into the general church body. They were a separate group, and there has been no real encouragement to have the young adults and the general church come together. A graduation/ceremony might be the best way to bridge that gap, so that both groups do not miss the benefit of working collaboratively to serve Christ.

Our implementation team discussed the importance of identifying the numerous outcomes that participants gained from this program. We designed the six-week course seeking to understand if young adults would embrace the church through offering of life skills and spiritual guidance. While we set out to connect young adults with the church, there were numerous benefits that participants expressed they gained from the intervention, such as discipline, identification of purpose, enhanced relationships with others and the importance of being in a support group. Incorporating these expressed benefits into the design of the model could greatly enhance the program and its success with young adults.

One of our desired goals for this intervention was to increase young adult church attendance. While the intervention has not necessarily led young adults to being in our Sunday worship services, the intervention has successfully connected young adults to the church as they faithfully attend every week. When asked why they don't attend on Sundays, the answers have varied. The majority are unable to attend on Sundays due to employment in retail and fast food industries. Others expressed that they simply feel like Thursdays is their "church" and the place where they feel most comfortable. I believe long-term intervention may eventually lead these young adults into Sunday services, but

even if it doesn't, these young adults are worshipping God every Thursday, encouraging one another, and learning how their faith in God should direct their lives. In a day when many people engage in worship via telecasts and even podcasts, it is possible that embracing non-traditional worship service days and methods may be the next frontier for the church.

Our planning team initially discussed having a parent component of our program, but we voted against it believing that it might offend our young adults. However, there were many times during our six-week sessions in which we wished we had engaged parents. The fact is, the majority of our young adults are still living with parents/relatives, and this appears to be a growing phenomenon across America. Our initial belief was that a parent component could help support the instruction young adults are receiving in their sessions, as well as assist parents with understanding the young adults in their houses. More research is needed to determine the content of a parent component and its usefulness or lack thereof, but nearly everyone involved agreed at the end of the intervention that a parent component could have enhanced the process for participants.

Communicating with young adults was a major lesson learned. We implemented this project understanding that millennials were more technological and, therefore, we relied on email and Facebook for our recruiting. We discovered that our young adults were not responsive to email or Facebook, but communicate most effectively through text messaging, Instagram and personal invitation. Presently, we have signed up with a mass text messaging company that sends weekly texts to our participants to keep them engaged, and it works perfectly. The young adults prefer this method of communication, and our initial perception of a lack of interest from young adults was really our failure to

reach out to them using the form of communication they are most comfortable utilizing. Ministries that desire to work with young adults must be careful to not rely on "the way the church has always done it". If it is simply an announcement in church, or on the church's website, sent via postal mail or even email, it may not ever be seen by young adults. However, text messaging, Instagram, Snapchats or even personal invitations are successful ways of engaging young adults.

Lastly, one of the most important components of this model that we believe must be enhanced is the mentorship component. We were unable to attract enough mentors to participate in the program, but we believe the benefits of each participant having their own dedicated mentor would provide young adults the in-depth guidance and coaching they desire. The young adults are really looking for wisdom and direction, outside of their parents, to help them understand faith, life and their purpose. Young adults frequently remained on church grounds until 11 p.m. after each session, just to talk to adults about their lives and to seek their counsel. We believe this is a great sign of need, as questions ranged from career selection and spiritual gifts to sexual relationships and illegal acts. When young adults feel connected to someone in the church who is willing to listen and assist without judgment, those young adults will make a commitment to the church.

Summary

The Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering model was a great success and shows great promise for reaching young adults for Christ and the church. Using realness, relevancy and relationship building as the pillars for the model, young adults have found

the program to not only be beneficial, but a necessary part of their week. When young people see the church offering skills and faith that they need, they will become great supporters of that church. The church is being challenged by today's generation to fulfill the Great Commission, in which we are called to go out to all generations. The church must not take it for granted that the children of its present parishioners will naturally come to them. The church must be creative, proactive, flexible and open if it desires to have young adults within its ministries.

While the model and curricula needs further development in the addition of subsequent phases, and possibly aforementioned supportive components, it shows great promise, as both church attending and non-church attending young adults overwhelmingly expressed the benefits of the program. Some young adults drive more than 20 miles to attend weekly groups and expressed that most churches have Bible studies, but do not teach life skills – something they really need at this stage of their lives. The young adults particularly appreciated learning God's rules on relationships and finances, the areas they all expressed that they need the most help in their lives.

Conclusion

Throughout this project, the researcher's life, ministry and commitment to improving the lives of young adults has grown incredibly. The young adult Christian education group (Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering) that was started as part of this project continues to run every Thursday at our church, and the attendance and commitment of the young adults to this group has been incredible. The enthusiasm of the

young adults encourages this researcher's heart, and they are constantly thanking the church for this weekly group. Even as we are no longer able to offer participants gas as an incentive to come to group, weekly attendance continues to grow. Additionally, the young adults have taken the initiative to insure dinner is prepared for each group, and they are consistently inviting new people into the group. Parents of many of these young people have come to thank the researcher for this program, stating that they could never get their young adult children to come to church before, but since this group started, there is a new excitement to go to church and an encouraging enthusiasm about life coming from their child.

There was a sort of selfish impetus for this researcher to pursue work with young adults, as the father of three young adult daughters, ages twenty-two, twenty-four and twenty-five. As an engaged pastor and father, the researcher believed he did everything right to raise his daughters through high school graduation. However, upon their graduation, his heart broke as he witnessed his own daughters fall into smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol, fornication, tattoos, abusive relationships, lack of motivation and much of the self-destructive behavior that has often become stereotypical of urban millennials. The researcher spent more than a few nights feeling like he had failed as a father, and these feelings often made him feel unfit to preach or pastor as well. The researcher was drowning in his emotions when he began this project, with skepticism of if anything could be done to reach this millennial generation of which his daughters are part of. There were some dark days, even during this doctoral process, in which the researcher wondered if there was any hope for his own daughters.

The researcher feels he has been so blessed by this process, as it provided him great insight into the world of his daughters, and enlightened and empowered him to understand and implement things that have completely changed his life. This process has also revived his daughters and launched them into being the incredible women he and his wife always believed God created them to be. The researcher's eldest daughter was not able to fully participate in the program; however, she was insistent on working collaboratively with him to help him understand young adults and what a good program needed to incorporate. In one of their pre-sessions, his eldest daughter actually facilitated the group, honestly sharing her trials and temptations with them and the nearly life-ending consequences God had rescued her from. The researcher was amazed to watch this child share Bible verses to encourage her peers. Today, she has enrolled in a Bible college and has preached her first sermon.

The researcher's second eldest daughter was a participant in the program, and within his first year of the doctoral program, she gave birth to his granddaughter, Zuri Miles. The middle daughter and the researcher have always possessed a very special relationship, and he has often been accused of being harder on her than her sisters. There is truth to this accusation, as he has always seen great potential within her, and he desperately wanted to see her grab hold of what he believed God had in store for her life. During this doctoral process, the researcher's middle daughter found herself in places she never imagined. However, she has really held too many of the things she was taught in the program and has thereby made incredible changes in her life. She has stopped engaging in many of the behaviors that were sabotaging her success, and in a recommitment to God, she has made better choices for her life that are benefiting her and

her daughter. During the pilot phase of Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering, she attended regularly and invited as many of her friends as she could to weekly groups, sometimes even transporting them to group herself.

The researcher's youngest daughter, who had not talked to him in over a year, gave birth to his grandson, who he had not seen, and was trapped in an abusive relationship when the researcher started the doctoral program. She has been his biggest supporter throughout the entire process and remains a faithful participant in the weekly groups. The transformation of her life and relationship with her father is a testament that God truly answers prayer, as the researcher continues to be amazed at the things God is doing in her life. When he looks for proof of the success of this project, he looks into her eyes and sees that the work of engaging young adults is not just important, it is a necessity. No matter what is going on in her life, she not only makes sure that she attends groups, but she encourages others to attend as well. She is a leader within the young adult group and shares with everyone how transformational the group has been for her. She openly shares her testimony with others and encourages others to choose Jesus. Whenever the researcher feels tired and even thinks of cancelling a group, she adamantly reminds him that the young adults who attend need these groups and can't afford to not get the wisdom and guidance that are provided in the groups.

The researcher shares this impact that this project has made upon his own family as a testament of the power of this work. Beyond his own family, so many of the young adults consistently express their thankfulness for the group, and they all have different parts of the program that they credit for bringing a change into their lives. They regularly remind the researcher and the other adults of how important the group is to them, and the

need for there to be more groups like this. Not all of the attending young adults attend Sunday services, but they faithfully attend Thursdays. When the researcher asks them about attending church, many have responded by saying, "Thursday nights is my church. I grow so much when I come here."

In conclusion, Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering blesses the participants and the facilitator, and programs such as these may be the missing link that is needed to insure that our churches and communities are comprised of healthy, God-centered families and individuals of all ages.

APPENDIX A

PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULTS

Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering Pre-test Results

* On a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being "not true", 2 being "somewhat" and 3 being "true", please circle your TRUEST response to the statement.

Total Pre-Test Surveys Collected – 20

1. My relationship with God is very important in determining my choices in relationships, education and career paths.

   1 2 **(5)-25%** 3 **(15)-75%**

2. Most of my friends believe in God and their faith is clearly demonstrated in their language, actions and choices.

   1 **(2)-10%** 2 **(14)-70%** 3 **(4)-20%**

3. It's important to regularly attend church.

   1 **(2)-10%** 2 **(6)-30%** 3 **(12)-60%**

4. I am comfortable with my understanding of the Bible and the teachings of Christ.

   1 **(2)-10%** 2 **(10)-50%** 3 **(8)-40%**

5. My life is a great example to others of what being a Christian is all about.

   1 **(8)-40%** 2 **(10)-50%** 3 **(2)-10%**

6. I am regularly engaged in bringing others to Christ.

   1 **(10)-50%** 2 **(8)-40%** 3 **(2)-10%**

7. I am very strong in my understanding of Christianity.

   1 **(1)-5%** 2 **(4)-20%** 3 **(15)-75%**

8. Attending church and growing in my faith are essential to me being successful in life.

   1**(1)-5%** 2 **(4)-20%** 3 **(15)-75%**

9. I believe churches need to hold special sessions outside of weekly worship services to teach young adults "life skills" according to the Bible.

   1 2 **(4)-20%** 3 **(16)-80%**

10. I believe many young adults make "life-altering" mistakes when they are disconnected from God and church.

1 (1)-5% 2 (6)-30% 3 (13)-65%

11. I am completely comfortable with where I am in my spiritual and personal growth.

1 (4)-20% 2 (9)-45% 3 (7)-35%

12. I could use additional teaching and support to insure that I stay on God's path for my life.

1 (1)-5% 2 (2)-10% 3 (17)-85%

Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering Post-test Results

* On a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being "not true", 2 being "somewhat" and 3 being "true", please circle your TRUEST response to the statement based upon your participation and experience in the young adult sessions over the last six weeks.

Total Post-test Surveys Collected – 14

1. My relationship with God is very important in determining my choices in relationships, education and career paths.

   1 | 2 **(3)-21%** | 3 **(11)-79%**

2. Most of my friends believe in God and their faith is clearly demonstrated in their language, actions and choices.

   1 **(1)-7%** | 2 **(11)-79%** | 3 **(2)-14%**

3. It's important to regularly attend church.

   1 | 2 **(4)-29%** | 3 **(10)-71%**

4. I am comfortable with my understanding of the Bible and the teachings of Christ.

   1 **(1)-7%** | 2 **(10)-71%** | 3 **(3)-21%**

5. My life is a great example to others of what being a Christian is all about.

   1 **(2)-14%** | 2 **(11)-79%** | 3 **(1)-7%**

6. I am regularly engaged in bringing others to Christ.

   1 **(7)-50%** | 2 **(3)-21%** | 3 **(4)-29%**

7. I am very strong in my understanding of Christianity.

   1 | 2 **(6)-43%** | 3 **(8)-57%**

8. Attending church and growing in my faith are essential to me being successful in life.

   1 | 2 **(4)-29%** | 3 **(10)-71%**

9. I believe churches need to hold special sessions outside of weekly worship services to teach young adults life skills according to the Bible.

   1 | 2 | 3 **(14)-100%**

10. I believe many young adults make life-altering mistakes when they are disconnected from God and church.

1	2 (2)-14%	3 (12)-86%

11. I am completely comfortable with where I am in my spiritual and personal growth.

1 (2)-14%	2 (7)-50%	3 (5)-36%

12. I could use additional teaching and support, to insure that I stay on Gods path for my life.

1	2 (1)-7%	3 (13)-93%

APPENDIX B

POST-EVALUATION SURVEY RESULTS

Post-evaluation Survey Results

Total Post-evaluation Surveys Collected – 14

1. Attending the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions has:

    a. Made an incredible impact upon my life, encouraging me to live more as God has called me to live. **(14)-100%**
    b. Has been good, but has not necessarily made me think of making changes to my life.
    c. Has not been helpful nor enjoyable.

2. I kept attending the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions because:

    a. The food
    b. The gas money
    c. The life-enriching lessons, the fellowship with other young adults and for guidance in my life **(14)-100%**
    d. Someone made me go.

3. During the course of the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions, I invited others to come to the class with me.

    a. No **(3)-21%**
    b. Yes, 1-2 persons **(10)-71%**
    c. Yes, 3 or more persons **(1)-7%**

4. I believe the Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions should be:

    a. 3 to 4 sessions
    b. 6 sessions
    c. Ongoing sessions **(14)-100%**

5. The Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering sessions are helping me grow in my relationship with Jesus Christ and giving me a better understanding of my faith.

    a. Yes **(14)-100%**
    b. No

6. I believe more young adults would be involved in church if there were more programs like Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering.

   a. Yes **(14)-100%**
   b. No

7. I believe with proper training, I could one day teach the sessions of Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering to young adults.

   a. Yes **(13)-93%**
   b. No **(1)-7%**

APPENDIX C

SESSION MATERIALS

Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering©

"Don't Just Survive, Thrive!!!"

THE TRANSITION FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

SESSION ONE

Charles Lee-Johnson and Associates

Corona Community AME Church

Telephone (951) 371-9233; www.coronaame.com

Email: ccameyoungadult@gmail.com

Session One

The Transition From Surviving To Thriving

DEFINING BIBLICAL SUCCESS

_____. – *"The Lord will give you prosperity in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you, blessing you with many children, numerous livestock, and abundant crops. [12] The Lord will send rain at the proper time from his rich treasury in the heavens and will bless all the work you do. You will lend to many nations, but you will never need to borrow from them. [13] If you listen to these commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today, and if you carefully obey them, the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you will always be on top and never at the bottom. [14] You must not turn away from any of the commands I am giving you today, nor follow after other gods and worship them."*

_____. – *"Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. [2] But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. [3] They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do."*

_____. – *"[10] The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."*

_____. – *"[33] Seek the Kingdom of God[a] above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."*

CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?

How many Authors Does the Bible Have? _____.

Why is this significant?

What does it mean that the Bible is "Canonized"?

How Many Books of the Bible?

Who assembled the Bible?

ORGANIZATION OF THE BIBLE

Here are the different literary genres in the Old Testament, along with the Bible books contained within those genres:

_____: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

_____: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

_____: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

_____: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

And here are the different literary genres in the New Testament:

_____: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

_____: Acts

_____: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.

_____: Revelation

What are the 3 Types of People?

a.

b.

c.

Name the Five Steps of Intentional Living Model:

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

Adulthood is a journey, not a _____

Define Adulthood and how it is determined.

_____. – " [11-14] *I have a lot more to say about this, but it is hard to get it across to you since you've picked up this bad habit of not listening. By this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics on God again, starting from square one – baby's milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God's ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong."*

Name the five things the adult must conquer, their significance and corresponding scripture:

a.

Proverbs 23:20-21 – *"Oh listen, dear child—become wise; point your life in the right direction. Don't drink too much wine and get drunk; don't eat too much food and get fat. Drunks and gluttons will end up on skid row, in a stupor and dressed in rags."*

b.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 – *"God wants you to live a pure life. Keep yourselves from sexual promiscuity.[4-5] Learn to appreciate and give dignity to your body, not abusing it, as is so common among those who know nothing of God."*

c.

Proverbs 20:13 – *"Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare."*

d.

Proverbs 11:2 – *"When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom."*

e.

Proverbs 18:16 – *"A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before the great."*

What is the Central Theme for Personal Success?

Life is _____. From your _____ to your _____; From the time you __ _____ to the time you _____; From your _____ to your _____; Life is a _____; But as long as you are still _____, you still have a _____.

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 – *"[8] We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. [9] We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed."*

"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward." – Martin Luther King, Jr.

What does this mean for you?

Outside of Satan, who is your worst and greatest enemy?

James 1:14-15 – *"The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer."*

Define potential:

Enemies to potential (*Maximizing Your Potential* by Myles Munroe)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

14.

God's power in you is stronger than all the enemies of your potential!!!

Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering©

"Don't Just Survive, Thrive!!!"

RELATIONSHIP SUCCESS

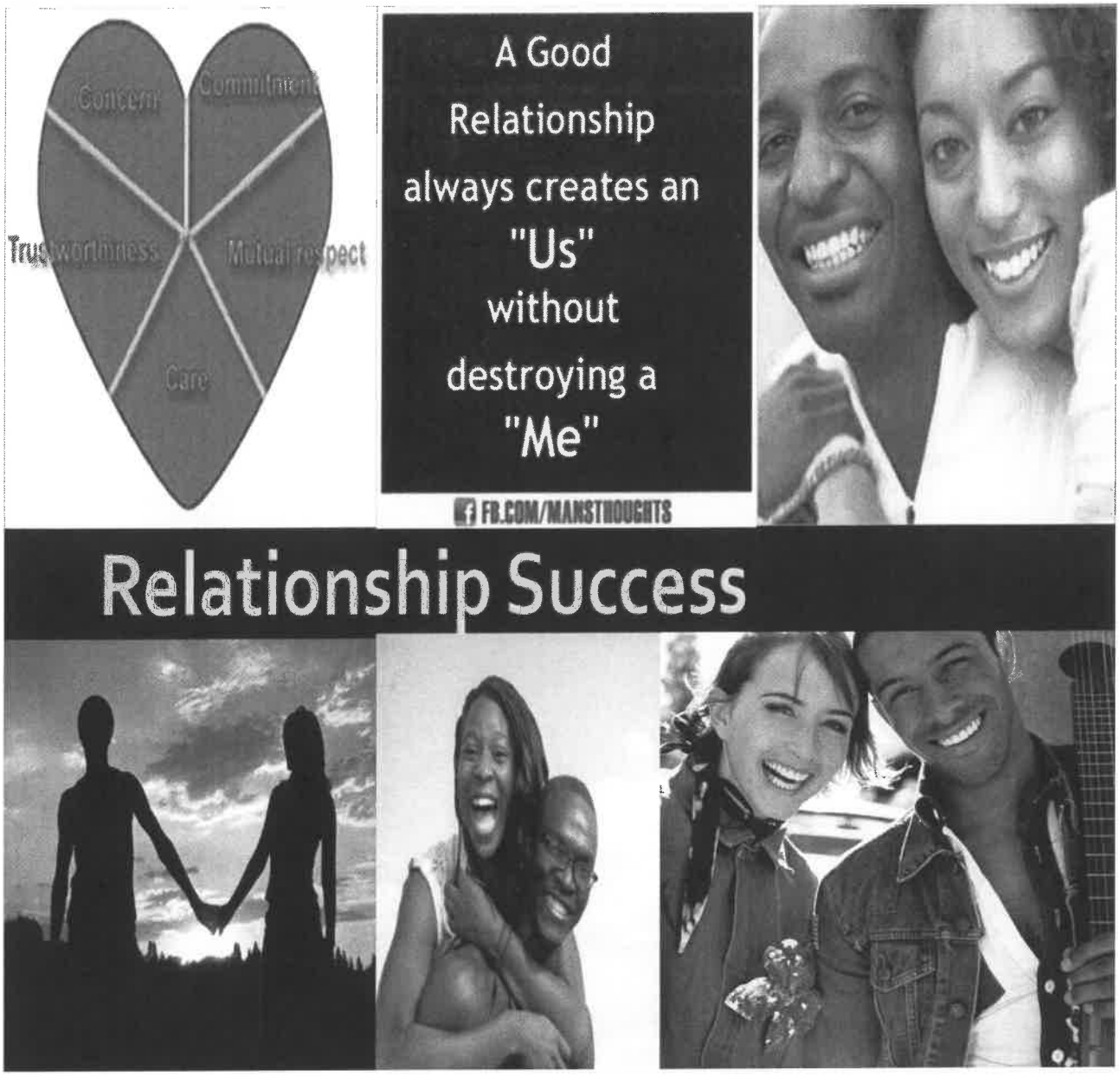
SESSION TWO

Charles Lee-Johnson and Associates

Corona Community AME Church

Telephone (951) 371-9233; www.coronaame.com

Email: ccameyoungadult@gmail.com


Concern
Commitment
Trustworthiness
Mutual respect
Care
A Good
Relationship
always creates an
"Us"
without
destroying a
"Me"
FB.COM/MANSTHOUGHTS
Relationship Success

Session Two and Session Three Handout

Relationship Success

1. A relationship is more than finding the _____; it's also about being the _____.

2. Being the right person begins with my _____.

3. _____: - *"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."*

4. Most men actually want to get _____.

5. Name the six types of women no guy wants to marry:

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

   f.

6. He actually wants to be with the _____.

7. The ten types of guys she doesn't want

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

   f.

   g.

   h.

   i.

   j.

8. Christian dating has one purpose, which is _____. If its not going there, you should not be in it. It's _____.

9. Ten most common reasons relationships fail

   a. Getting too serious too quickly

   b. Making another person responsible for your happiness

   c. Not saying what's on your mind

   d. Not spending quality time together

   e. Not truly listening to one another

   f. Not trusting when you should

g. Continuing to bring up past issues

h. Testing the relationship (playing games)

i. Keeping score

j. Expecting to change the other person

10. Six more reasons relationships fail:

a. God is not the center of the relationship

b. Lack of accountability

c. Poor maintenance (stopped dating)

d. Non-reconciled childhood issues (trust, expectations, etc.)

e. Lack of rules of engagement

f. Selfishness (love and respect)

11. For success in relationships, these two verses should guide me:

_____, Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

_____, For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

12. 11 Lessons from Jacob and Rachel Love Story:

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

h.

i.

j.

k.

13. How to Succeed in A Relationship

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

h.

14. Christian Dating Trips

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

h.

i.

15. Christian Dating Red Flags

a.

b

c.

d.

e.

f.

Young, Gifted, Saved, and Prospering©

"Don't Just Survive, Thrive!!!"

RELATIONSHIP SUCCESS: THE ART OF ACCEPTING AND LETTING GO

SESSION THREE

Charles Lee-Johnson and Associates

Corona Community AME Church

Telephone (951) 371-9233; www.coronaame.com

Email: ccameyoungadult@gmail.com

Session Three

The Art of Accepting and Letting Go

1. The most impactful and critical factor to your success in life will be the peace you make with _____.

2. Unresolved issues with parents can lead to:

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

   f.

   g.

   h.

"Cleanin Out My Closet"

Where's my snare?
I have no snare in my headphones - there you go
Yeah... yo, yo

Have you ever been hated or discriminated against?
I have; I've been protested and demonstrated against
Picket signs for my wicked rhymes, look at the times
Sick as the mind of the motherfucking kid that's behind
All this commotion emotions run deep as ocean's exploding
Tempers flaring from parents just blow 'em off and keep going
Not taking nothing from no one give 'em hell long as I'm breathing
Keep kicking ass in the morning and taking names in the evening
Leave 'em with a taste as sour as vinegar in they mouth

See they can trigger me, but they'll never figure me out
Look at me now; I bet ya probably sick of me now ain't you momma?
I'mma make you look so ridiculous now

I'm sorry momma!
I never meant to hurt you!
I never meant to make you cry; but tonight
I'm cleaning out my closet (one more time)
I said I'm sorry momma!
I never meant to hurt you!
I never meant to make you cry, but tonight
I'm cleaning out my closet

Ha! I got some skeletons in my closet
And I don't know if no one knows it
So before they thrown me inside my coffin and close it
I'mma expose it; I'll take you back to '73
Before I ever had a multi-platinum selling CD
I was a baby, maybe I was just a couple of months
My faggot father must have had his panties up in a bunch
Cause he split, I wonder if he even kissed me goodbye
No I don't. On second thought I just fucking wished he would die
I look at Hailie, and I couldn't picture leaving her side
Even if I hated Kim, I grit my teeth and I'd try
To make it work with her at least for Hailie's sake
I maybe made some mistakes
But I'm only human, but I'm man enough to face them today
What I did was stupid, no doubt it was dumb
But the smartest shit I did was take the bullets outta that gun
Cause I'da killed him; shit I would've shot Kim and him both
It's my life, I'd like to welcome y'all to "The Eminem Show"

I'm sorry momma!
I never meant to hurt you!
I never meant to make you cry; but tonight
I'm cleaning out my closet (one more time)
I said I'm sorry momma!
I never meant to hurt you!
I never meant to make you cry, but tonight
I'm cleaning out my closet

Now I would never diss my own momma just to get recognition
Take a second to listen for who you think this record is dissing
But put yourself in my position; just try to envision
Witnessing your momma popping prescription pills in the kitchen
Bitching that someone's always going through her purse and shit's missing

Going through public housing systems, victim of Munchhausen's Syndrome
My whole life I was made to believe I was sick when I wasn't
'Til I grew up, now I blew up, it makes you sick to ya stomach
Doesn't it? Wasn't it the reason you made that CD for me Ma?
So you could try to justify the way you treated me Ma?
But guess what? You're getting older now and it's cold when you're lonely
And Nathan's growing up so quick he's gonna know that you're phony
And Hailie's getting so big now; you should see her, she's beautiful
But you'll never see her - she won't even be at your funeral!
See what hurts me the most is you won't admit you was wrong
Bitch do your song - keep telling yourself that you was a mom!
But how dare you try to take what you didn't help me to get
You selfish bitch; I hope you fucking burn in hell for this shit
Remember when Ronnie died and you said you wished it was me?
Well guess what, I am dead - dead to you as can be!

I'm sorry momma!
I never meant to hurt you!
I never meant to make you cry; but tonight
I'm cleaning out my closet (one more time)
I said I'm sorry momma!
I never meant to hurt you!
I never meant to make you cry, but tonight
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I'm sorry momma!
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I said I'm sorry momma!
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I never meant to make you cry, but tonight
I'm cleaning out my closet

3. What impact do dads have on daughters?
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.
    e.
    f.
    g.

4. What impact do dads have on sons?
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
   f.
   g.
   h.

5. What is the impact of not having a father?

6. What is the impact of mothers on sons?
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
   f.
   g.

7. What is the impact of mothers on daughters?
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.
   f.

8. Serenity Prayer says:

9. List the nine steps to recover from emotional distress
   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

   f.

   g.

   h.

   i.

10. List the 12 Steps of Recovery
   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

   f.

   g.

   h.

   i.

   j.

   k.

l.

Young, Gifted, Saved and Prospering©

"Don't Just Survive, Thrive!!!"

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

SESSION FOUR

Charles Lee-Johnson and Associates

Corona Community AME Church

Telephone (951) 371-9233; www.coronaame.com

Email: ccameyoungadult@gmail.com

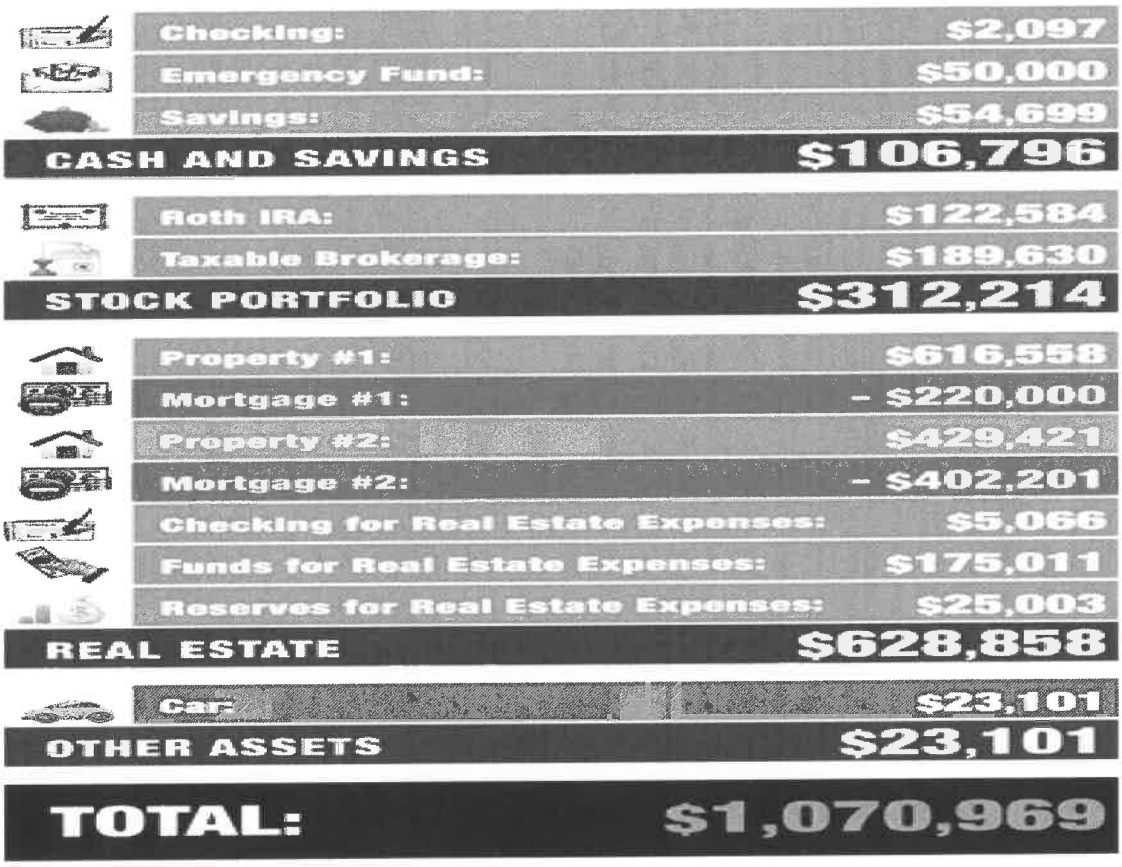
Session Four

Financial Management

1. Anton Ivanov, the 27-year-old who became a millionaire had a _____, and therefore, he met the goal he set for himself at 16 years old of being a millionaire.

2. Ivanov's strategy included:

   - Read Every book possible on success, finances and investing (Favorite: *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill)
   - He saved 60% of everything he made as a young adult
   - Received a degree in information technology ($55,000 per year)
   - Worked additional jobs and saved all the money from these sources
   - Did what he could to live for free (maximized)
   - Became a lazy investor – seven asset classes: domestic, large-, mid- and small-cap funds, emerging market funds, commodity funds, with a small chunk in bonds
   - Real Estate – purchased two properties
   - Made increasing his income a priority – not to buy more but to invest more…
   - Became a millionaire at 26, started when he was 16



3. A _____ is a plan of action, designed to achieve a particular goal.

4. A _____, without a _____, is just a _____.

5. Proverbs 16:3 says: *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans."*

6. Every day I should be:
   - Reading your scriptures and praying
   - Working out
   - Planning for my future
   - Learning something new to help me reach my goals
   - Pursue new opportunities for growth
   - Being frugal/spending as little as you can
   - Minimize and eliminate time with people or things that can't get me to my goals

7. First things first: I need to do these things immediately in my life:

    a. Have _____ in the bank (Remember 10 people who will give $10/month for 10 months).
    b. _____ scriptures i commit to memory
    c. Pursuit of a _____
    d. Increase income/live on 40% of what I earn, save and invest the rest
    e. Create a clear _____ of where you want to be
    f. Write out a detailed _____of how you will achieve your vision
    g. 3 _____
    h. Daily _____ to match your plan

8. The 8 keys to living a successful christian life are:

    a.

    b.

    c.

    d.

    e.

    f.

    g.

    h.

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FINANCIAL AND LIFE SUCCESS: THE PATH

SESSION FIVE

Charles Lee-Johnson and Associates

Corona Community AME Church

Telephone (951) 371-9233; www.coronaame.com

Email: ccameyoungadult@gmail.com

Session Five

The Path

1. The scripture below comes from: _____

[28] "But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? [29] Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. [30] They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'

2. Define vision:

3. _____ – says "Where there is no vision, the people perish".

4. A vision without action is merely a _____. Action without _____ ___ is just passing of _____. It's only with _____and ___ _____ that we can change the world.

5. A vision is not a vision until it is _____.

6. I need to have plans for what 5 areas of my life:
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.
   e.

7. Setting goals will help me do what 4 things:
   a.
   b.
   c.
   d.

8. S.M.A.R.T. goals are :
   S-
   M-
   A-
   R-
   T-

9. The importance of planning is that if you _____ to _____, then you _____ to _____.

10. Management by objective is a planning method with the following 6 components:
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.
    e.
    f.

11. Name four plans I should regularly have:
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.

12. Define discipline:

13. What are the six tenets of discipline:
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.
    e.
    f.

14. Name the ten habits of millionaires in america
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.
    e.

f.
g.
h.
i.
j.

15. What is the rule of 72?

16. List 10 investing terms
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.
    e.
    f.
    g.
    h.
    i.
    j.

List types of investments:

SMART Goal Planning Form

Specific – WHO? WHAT?

Measurement/Assessment – HOW? What Do I need to Do?

Action – List the things I need to do (put a date when it will be done)

Realistic – EXPECTED RESULT?

By

Timed – WHEN?

Management by Objective

GOAL:

METHODS: (WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS WAYS I CAN MAKE THIS HAPPEN)

a.

b.

c.

d.

RESOURCES:

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

ROLE MODELS:

a.

b.

TIMEFRAME

COMMITMENT (What will it cost me?)

Goals	Action Steps	Deadlines
1.		
2.		

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